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English Men of Letters

HERMAN MELVILLE

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HERMAN MELVILLE

BY

JOHN FREEMAN

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PREFACE

THE present volume has the advantage—and all the disadvantages—of being the first book on Herman Melville to be published in England.

Acknowledgements are due to Professor Raymond Weaver's *Herman Melville, Mariner and Mystic* (1921), and to its author for inquiries readily answered; to Mrs. Eleanor Metcalf, through whose kindness I have been able to approach her mother, Melville's daughter; to Mr. H. S. Salt, who at one time contemplated writing a book on Melville, and freely placed at my disposal the material in his hands; to Mr. Robin Flower, Mr. Conrad Aiken, the Rev. A. J. Young, M.A., and many others who have helped me with suggestions which became the more valuable as the lack of biographical material became more baffling; and, if he will permit it, to the general Editor of the new series of "English Men of Letters," Mr. J. C. Squire, who, because of old admiration of Melville's genius, might very well have claimed the subject for his own pen instead of assisting mine. Reference has also been made to *Some Personal Letters of Herman Mel-*

ville and a Bibliography, by Mr. Meade Minnigerode (1922).

I hope America will pardon the inclusion of an American writer among English men of letters.

J. F.

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English Men of Letters

HERMAN MELVILLE

"It is for the nation's sake, and not for her authors' sake, that I would have America be heedful of the increasing greatness among her writers. For how great the shame, if other nations should be before her, in crowning her heroes of the pen!"—*Melville on "Hawthorne and his Mosses."*

CHAPTER I

"What a madness and anguish it is, that an author can never—under no conceivable circumstances—be at all frank with his readers!"—Letter from Herman Melville to Evert Duyckinck.

CHILDHOOD—YOUTH—FIRST VOYAGE

HERMAN MELVILLE, the most powerful of all the great American writers, was born on the 1st August 1819, in New York. His father, Allan, was the fourth child of Major Thomas Melville. The family was of old Scots lineage, being descended from that John Melville of Carnbee who was knighted by James the Sixth, and a yet earlier origin has been traced in a Sir Richard Melville who took allegiance to Edward the First in the thirteenth century.

Herman's grandfather, Thomas, was the first of the Melvilles to be born in America. Allan Melville, son of a Scots clergyman of Leven (Fife), had emigrated in 1748 and became a merchant at Boston. Herman's father and grandfather both died in 1832, when he was but thirteen, and while references to his father are to be found—open and veiled—in the novelist's work, there are but few direct indications of a concern with any earlier generation. Herman was not in-

sensible to the distinction and privileges of birth, and it may be permitted to trace his mistrust of democracy to an active sense of aristocracy; but in the main he helps a biographer but little to search into family records. His father, Allan, did not share this indifference, for only a year before Herman's birth he visited Scotland in order to make himself known to his distinguished collaterals. The memorials of this visit are brief, but he records that his reception by the Earl of Leven and Melville was very hospitable and friendly. Nevertheless, the visit was not repeated, nor does it seem to have been followed by correspondence. It was a mere "call" of courtesy and curiosity, prompted immediately, no doubt, by Allan's poring over *Memoirs of his own Life by Sir James Melvil of Hallhill,* a volume published in London in 1683, and a genealogy which he had pleased or teased himself with constructing. Mr. Weaver, Herman Melville's biographer, to whom we owe almost all that American research has been able to achieve for his subject, has stated that this volume contained the autograph of Thomas Melville of Scoonie, Herman's clerical ancestor; and such a book, with such an autograph, would probably suffice to prompt even a faintly romantic exile to an act of recognition and brief reunion with his family.

Allan had travelled a good deal to Europe before his marriage in 1814, and from 1800 to a little before his death in 1832 he kept a journal in which he records his travels and measures their distance—"by land 24,425 miles, by water 48,460 miles", and so on; journeys not at all remarkable in the pursuit of his trade as a general importer. At the age of thirty-two

he married Maria Gansevoort, a lady whose family had won fame and honour in the War of Independence. The Gansevoorts were of Dutch origin, and if the assumption be admitted that the novelist drew his mother when he drew Mrs. Glendinning in *Pierre*—an assumption to be weighed later on—it would be judged that Maria Gansevoort retained a marked pride of family to the end of her days. She was the only daughter of that General Peter Gansevoort who, in the War of Independence, achieved conspicuous service against Burgoyne's forces and was recognized by a Congress vote of thanks. A certain satisfaction in the public services of her father, and in the recognition of them by Washington and the State, may be pardoned in a woman whose lot is cast in a very fluctuant and unstable society; and if Maria Gansevoort was, as she has been reckoned, cold, proud and arrogant, it is possible that these unhappy qualities were assumed for defence and distinction, and only by habit passed into her character. Here again the question of the validity of Melville's portrait of Mrs. Glendinning arises; and it is proper to state at once that while that character, in *Pierre,* may quite truly contain hints and figures of Melville's mother, a difficulty still remains; for our author was a great imaginative artist, drawing with a free and wanton hand, using the most fantastic liberties when he pleased, and seldom constrained to mere literality. *Pierre* is a wild, vague, painful book, and of all the "ambiguities" of its alternative title none is so questionable as the identity of Mrs. Glendinning and his mother. Another reason for doubting whether Herman would indeed paint his mother's picture so darkly, under the name

of another, is that *Pierre* was published in 1852, while she was yet alive and indeed, as Mr. Weaver himself remarks, was living mainly with her son. It is inconceivable that he should write so of her while she lived, or that if the portrait was recognizable it was not recognized, and resented, by his mother herself, and all the more because of that imputed pride and cold arrogance. But there is no reference to a rupture of affection within public knowledge, though *Pierre* itself provoked asperities on the part of reviewers. 'Pride indeed there may have been in Mrs. Melville, but of pride outrunning affection and begetting coldness the proofs have yet to be produced. A sense that she might have married better, that Allan was not only a trader but an unsuccessful one, and that the poverty into which his early death plunged her was an unmerited and prolonged trial, may have touched her acutely; and Herman may have been conscious of this. But speculative biography is dangerous.

Melville's mother ended her long life in 1871, after nearly forty years of widowhood; and if, for the reasons just given, the novelist's supposed portrait of her is to be somewhat strictly challenged, it is nevertheless to be remembered that, according to the American biographer of Herman, there still survives a tradition of her remoteness from those idealizations to which Herman's mind always tended. She was known, it appears, as a capable, managing wife and mother, whose present was dominated by her past and who could not forget, in the relative humbleness of her son's career, the lost splendour of her father's. It is said that once, in speaking of her, Melville exclaimed that his mother had hated him; the phrase is reported

by Melville's granddaughter, presumably on the authority of her mother, Melville's sole surviving child.

Allan Melville and Maria had been married nearly five years when Herman was born, the third of their children. During this period their life had been nomadic, and it was not until after Allan's visit of courtesy to the Melvilles in Scotland that they decided to leave Albany and settle in New York. They had already two children, Gansevoort (preserving the name of the mother's family) and Helen Marie, and three months after this settlement Herman was born. He was named Herman after his mother's brother, and inherited with the name the robustness of the Gansevoort physique; and in looks he grew to be strikingly like his mother. Then, and for a while longer, the family affairs were somewhat fortunate and the circumstances easy; and when Herman was five years old his father obtained a lease of a house which almost united, he said, the advantages of town and country, though far enough from his store to compel him to dine from home. Allan Melville loved his home and his children; Herman was the fourth and seven more were born before Allan's untimely death in 1832.

The young Herman trailed no clouds of glory for our eyes, and few traces of any kind are discoverable. When he was seven years old he was sent on a visit to his mother's brother, Peter Gansevoort. "He is very backward in speech and somewhat slow in comprehension, but you will find him as far as he understands men and things both solid and profound, and of a docile and amiable disposition. . . . Let him avoid green fruit and unseasonable exposure to the sun." It is

hard not to be amused at this injunction to spare one for whom the future held so much green and bitter fruit and whose genius blazed in so sudden a heat; and it is hard not to be amused also at the depreciation of Herman's wits, when we reflect how quickly this backward child ripened and published the singular *Mardi* at thirty, the transcendent *Moby-Dick* at thirty-two, and the disquieting, significant *Pierre* at thirty-three—young indeed for the writing of prose masterpieces. And docile and amiable? In later chapters we shall see ample and acute reasons for doubting the docility, and wondering by what suppressions the character of amiable was sustained.

Herman seems to have spent other summer holidays at his uncle's, in Albany, but his school life nevertheless went on normally. "We expect Gansevoort on Sunday, at fartherest," his father wrote, "when we wish Herman also to be here, that they may recommence their studies together on Monday next, with equal chances of preferment. . . . If they understand early that inclination must always yield to Duty, it will become a matter of course when their vacations expire to bid a fond adieu to friends and amusements, and return home cheerfully to their books, and they will consequently imbibe habits of order and punctuality." The moral astringency is as powerful as in the case of that later American writer of unsuspected genius, Emily Dickinson; only, in her case, there was an added sharpness of evangelical tyranny which, continuing long after her escape from girlhood, turned the fine edge of her spirit. This tyranny Herman Melville escaped.

When he was little more than eight years old the

family moved again, but the removal this time did not signify increasing prosperity. After two years his father's affairs became so dismal that he removed once more to Albany, and died after another two years, leaving his wife and the eight surviving children sadly impoverished. Herman was thirteen years of age, and remembered enough of the family vicissitudes to be able to record them in *Redburn, His First Voyage, being the Sailor-boy Confessions and Reminiscences of the Son-of-a-Gentleman in the Merchant Service.* It is a sufficiently explicit title, and the references to his own early years are likewise explicit. He speaks of the days, those delightful days, before his father failed after many adversities and died, and the opening pages are suffused with that tenderest mellow flush which memory and time unite, by a familiar chemistry, to pour upon the obscurities of the past. The literature of remembered childhood, which is the chief part of the literature of childhood, had a strong attraction for Melville, and he employs all his skill in composing a narrative of singular simplicity, relating childish things directly and freshly out of a love which points to happiness in the past and longing in the present. For Wellingborough Redburn is Herman Melville, especially when he writes of his father and his home. "Of winter evenings in New York, by the well-remembered sea-coal fire in old Greenwich-street, he used to tell my brother and me of the monstrous waves at sea, mountains high; of the masts bending like twigs; and all about Havre, and Liverpool, and about going up into the ball of St. Paul's in London. Indeed, during my early life, most of my thoughts of the sea were connected with the land; but with fine

old lands, full of mossy cathedrals and churches, and long, narrow, crooked streets without side-walks, and lined with strange houses. And especially I tried hard to think how such places must look of rainy days and Saturday afternoons; and whether indeed they did have rainy days and Saturdays there, just as we did here; and whether the boys went to school there, and studied geography, and wore their shirt collars turned over, and tied with a black ribbon; and whether their papas allowed them to wear boots, instead of shoes, which I so much disliked, for boots looked so manly." Under this spell of romance, cast by the admired voice of one who had travelled so far, his own thoughts, he says, went travelling yet farther, until, imagination kindling, he saw himself returning over those monstrous waves and reciting the wonders of barbarous countries, himself arrayed like a foreign prince to startle the eyes of all beholders:—"see what big eyes he has," his aunt whispered. He used to examine the furniture brought by his father from foreign parts, paintings, engravings, and what not, prying into them as if to force their romance from them: sea-paintings, French coloured prints, pictures of natural history, books in abundance, and on the title-page of many that mysterious word of Arabian potency, that strange key-name, *London*. More than all these in the childish eyes was "an old-fashioned glass ship, about eighteen inches long, and of French manufacture, which my father, some thirty years before, had brought home from Hamburg as a present to a great-uncle of mine: Senator Wellingborough, who had died a member of Congress in the days of the old Constitution, and after whom I had the

honour of being named". It was, as already noted, from his mother's brother, General Herman Gansevoort, that Melville received his Christian name. In *Redburn,* Melville recaptures the primal joy when he recalls this little glass ship, with its ingenious crystal elaboration of masts and rigging and coloured figures running to and fro, yet never moving, "as I can take my oath"; and recollections such as these relate him to the millions of normal children who of all their sorrows remember little, and of all their joys retain undyingly the keenest. Melville was a normal healthy child living a normal commonplace life. At home his affections, as we have just seen, were centred upon familiar, simple things; at school, at the Albany Academy, he applied his slowness of comprehension so moderately that no record has been made of his progress from his entrance in 1830, when he joined his brother Gansevoort there; and when in 1862 his uncle, Peter Gansevoort, as Trustee, presided over an anniversary celebration, and Herman himself was welcomed as an author who had extended the honour of the Academy world-wide, there was apparently still no assertion of his precocity as a scholar; no wiseacre wagged his beard and pretended, "I told you so".

He was not long at the Albany Academy, for the death of his father and the subsequent poverty of his family drove him into the world, and in 1834 he entered the service of the New York State Bank, of which his Uncle Peter was a Trustee; and 1835 found him acting as clerk in his brother's shop. A biographical sketch of 1891 records that during that year Melville was a pupil of the Albany Classical Institute—a favourite pupil, not at all distinguished except in writing themes

and compositions; while in 1836 he was to be found in the household of his father's brother, Major Thomas Melville, at Pittsfield, actively assisting on the farm. His uncle was "grey-haired, but not wrinkled. . . . His manners were mild and kindly, with a faded brocade of old French breeding, which—contrasted with his surroundings at the time—impressed me as not a little interesting, not wholly without a touch of pathos.

"He never used the scythe, but I frequently raked with him in the hay-field. . . . By the late October fire, in the great hearth of the capacious kitchen of the old farm mansion, I remember to have seen him frequently sitting just before early bedtime, gazing into the embers, while his face plainly expressed to a sympathetic observer that his heart, thawed to the core under the influence of the general flame, carried him far away over the ocean to the gay boulevards. . . . It was the French graft upon the New England stock, which produced the autumnal apple: perhaps the mellower for the frost." The hand of the romantic artist appears in Melville's picture of his twin-natured uncle, and the touch of gallantry conferred upon him by nature or the painter, but the picture itself is an affectionate one. Thomas Melville died soon after Herman's voyages ended, and this record conveys a final impression of one whose image was clearly cherished with admiration and sympathy.

It may have been before he fled to sea—for flight his first voyage seems to us, in its unprepared suddenness—as well as afterwards, that Herman took the part of school-teacher; but it could not have occupied him for long since that flight occurred in 1837. His own

account of it is found, faintly disguised, in *Redburn,* and his reason for it is given on the first page with convincing brevity. "I was then but a boy. Some time previous my mother had removed from New York to a pleasant village on the Hudson river, where we lived in a small house, in a quiet way. Sad disappointments in several plans which I had sketched for my future life; the necessity of doing something for myself, united to a naturally roving disposition, had now conspired within me, to send me to sea as a sailor." His mother parted from him with a heavy heart and full eyes; and if *Redburn* is to be read as a literal story of his experiences, she must have been preoccupied with her grief when she permitted him to leave for a vast unknown so ill-equipped, so resourceless, so unsustained by anything outside his own heart. "Perhaps she thought me an erring and a wilful boy, and perhaps I was; but if I was, it had been a hard-hearted world and hard times that had made me so. I had learned to think much and bitterly before my time; all my young mounting dreams of glory had left me; and at that early age I was as unambitious as a man of sixty." Maybe Mrs. Melville was displeased that her son should have left the service of a bank, of which her brother was trustee, a household of which her brother-in-law was the kindly head, and a shop belonging to her eldest son, and then declined upon the merchant service with the notion of becoming a common seaman. An ambition to enter the American Navy would be one thing, and her family might have used some influence on the boy's behalf; but a desire to enter the merchant service was no ambition at all. No mother would be proud of such a son forming such a

plan, especially if she possessed even a little of the social pride and retrospective haughtiness attributed to Maria Gansevoort. Melville records only her grief and his own uncomprehending resistance against circumstances, he does not complain of any inattention or unkindness; yet the description of his singular accoutrement suggests inattention. He wore a leather cap, a grey shooting-jacket with great carved buttons, and boldly patched trousers; and he carried a fowling-piece and a small bundle of clothes. His journey to New York exhausted his little money, and he famished before he reached the house of a friend of his brother's. The friend accompanied him to the docks and picked out a ship for Liverpool, that the lad might join it, and Melville's account is amusing when he relates his friend's foolish attempts at kindness, and his pretence that the lad—the son of a gentleman—is going to sea as a sailor for the humour of it, when he might have gone with his tutor. It is amusing, but it tells of things that were humiliating when they happened. Amusing also, and less humiliating since he was unaccompanied by the blundering friend, is the account of selling the fowling-piece in order to buy clothes—a red shirt, a tarpaulin hat, a belt and a jack-knife, and so on; and faithful enough the account of preparing himself for sea-life before going on board. "After dinner I went into my room, locked the door carefully, and hung a towel over the knob, so that no one could peep through the keyhole, and then went to trying on my red woollen shirt before the glass, to see what sort of a looking sailor I was going to make. As soon as I got into the shirt I began to feel a sort of warm and red about the face, which I found was owing

to the reflection of the dyed wool upon my skin. After that, I took a pair of scissors and went to cutting my hair, which was very long. I thought every little would help, in making me a light hand to run aloft."

Feeling somewhat misanthropical, he says, he went down to join his ship the "Highlander". "A sailor! a barber's clerk, you mean; *you* going out in the ship? what, in that jacket?" exclaimed the chief mate. "Pillgarlic" was the first name bestowed on him, and then "Buttons"; and of his first duty he cries, "Was this then the beginning of my sea-career? set to cleaning out a pig-pen, the very first thing?" As the ship pointed for the Narrows and the water tapped her timbers, his heart sank; but he tried to think as he should think—of England, and the return, of his reception by his brothers and sisters, the adventures he would relate, and how even his elder brother would have to treat him with great consideration. But when he looked up "at the high, giddy masts, and thought how often I must be going up and down them, I thought sure enough that some luckless day or other, I would certainly fall overboard and be drowned. And then, I thought of lying down at the bottom of the sea, stark alone, with the great waves rolling over me, and no one in the wide world knowing that I was there. And I thought how much better and sweeter it must be, to be buried under the pleasant hedge that bounded the sunny south side of our village grave-yard, where every Sunday I had used to walk after church in the afternoon; and I almost wished I was there now; yes, dead and buried in that church-yard. All the time my eyes were filled with tears, and I kept holding my breath, to choke down the sobs, for indeed I could not

help feeling as I did, and no doubt any boy in the world would have felt just as I did then". Melville wrote this in 1849, twelve years after his voyage, but the narrative told of another is plainly enough the narrative of his own sensations, freshly remembered by a maturer mind reaching back to the lost time.

There is little pleasantness in the scene of Melville's first voyage—not in the comfortless ship, the cheating captain, the scandalous crew and the demoniac Jackson, nor in the drudgery and hardships which he recites so simply and unresentingly; yet pleasantness ensues when the recital is done because of the freshness of remembrance and the innocence of apprehension which he retained to the end of the journey. When one of the crew, a great curser and swearer, gibed at the boy and asked if his mother knew he was out, Melville was shocked at a blasphemy that seemed to profane his most cherished secrets; adding, in a phrase which only a morose commentator might think ambiguous, that at that time the name of mother was the centre of all his heart's finest feelings. Home thoughts touched him again when, being sea-sick, this same sailor, a Greenlander, tempted him with Jamaica spirits and so reminded him of the Juvenile Total Abstinence Association. In spite of this reminder the temptation prevailed, and he drank—a hard thing, he reflects, thus to break a vow before unbroken. He was also a member of an Anti-smoking Society, organized by the local Sunday School, and held out a little against the temptation to smoke Havanna cigars; trying, in fact, to keep himself unspotted from the world, and coming very soon to look with a premature

pity and half-obvious superiority upon the ignorant members of the crew. Disillusion followed, but the quickness of perception and reaction preserved him from bitterness, and made his story a happy one for all its ills and mishaps. His clothes were among the worst of these mishaps, and he describes them with the same unvarying simplicity that is so much more convincing than any humorous elaboration: the moleskin shooting-jacket which daily grew smaller, the landsman's Sunday high-heeled boots which he wore even when running aloft. His mental resources were not as yet developed, and it was not easy to escape from the pressure of hard tasks and general contempt; but he pleases himself by recalling how, while he was picking oakum by the hour and staring through a port-hole, he repeated Byron's verses to the ocean, from *Childe Harold,* which he had often spouted from the school platform.

He was but an impressionable, eager boy, with a romantic zest, when he landed in Liverpool, stared round for abbeys and minsters and lord mayors and races and coronations and huntings and festivals, for which the familiar engravings at home had prepared him, and found none of these things. The same romantic passion possessed him all the time he was in England, impelling him first to wander through the streets and next to haunt the lanes and green fields that came then close to the mercantile parts of the city; the city nibbling sheep-like at the fields and the fields still resisting extinction. But this passion was consumed in another when he turned the pages of a prized old volume which he carried with him when he joined the "Highlander"? It was a copy of *The Picture of*

Liverpool (1803), signed by his father at Riddough's Royal Hotel, Liverpool, in 1808, and containing a few pencil'd memoranda of forgotten trifles. The narrative of *Redburn* is interrupted while Melville reviews this precious little volume, and his first anxiety afterwards is to trace the streets and buildings named in it, and especially the hotel where his father had stayed. Alack, all was changed, for more than thirty years had passed. He had wanted to start by standing where his father had stood on leaving the hotel, and then, with the pencil'd jottings for guide, trace his footsteps as he had passed from place to place a generation before; but it was impossible, for Liverpool had grown and shaken itself, reformed and refashioned itself, and Riddough's hotel itself was erased.

The disappointment was painful and significant. During the first half of his life Herman Melville was investing himself with illusions and discovering them to be but illusions, and during the second half he was trying to make terms with the bareness that remained and avoid an exhausting, cynical conclusion. This early disillusion, the discovery that time and change had swept his father away, and all local traces of his father, and that the remembered figure survived only in his remembrance and affection, was as sharp as any might well be for a passionate, imaginative and utterly lonely boy of seventeen. Not until he had looked round and noted the medley of Liverpool migrants was he able to gaze less painfully upon the changes and remember his own nation. "For who was our father and our mother? Or can we point to any Romulus and Remus for our founders? Our ancestry is lost in the universal paternity: and Caesar and Alfred, St. Paul and Luther,

and Homer and Shakespeare are as much ours as Washington, who is as much the world's as our own. We are the heirs of all time, and with all nations we divide our inheritance. On this Western Hemisphere all tribes and people are forming into one federated whole; and there is a future which shall see the estranged children of Adam restored as to the old hearthstone in Eden."

But it was not Melville of seventeen that spoke thus, but Melville of thirty, the maturer mind and more enduring heart snatching the pen for a stealthy interpolation.

Another illusion, not less intimate, was murdered at the same time, the illusion of the kindness of life. A pitiful chapter of *Redburn* tells of Melville's discovery of a dying woman nursing two dead or dying children in the most squalid of slums, and his unavailing efforts to get help for the mother. Were they not, he cried, were they not human beings, with eyes and lips and ears like any queen? What right had anybody in the wide world to smile and be glad, when sights like this were to be seen? He did what he could, wishing yet afraid to do the last mercy by putting an end to their dying, and knowing that if he did, the law that permitted them to die without giving them a cup of water would spend a thousand pounds in convicting him who relieved them of existence. Tell me, he sighs, that story of Lazarus again, that I may find comfort in my heart for the poor and forlorn! The opposition of living to living, and of living to dying, the crudest and heaviest of early griefs, smote Melville bitterly on the threshold of the world, and made him question what all men must once or twice question. That he was never-

theless free from a luxurious sentimentality is clear from other pages of *Redburn*.

Yet a further disillusion or, to use his own word, mortification, befell him—the humiliating fact, wholly unforeseen, that in the main and apart from its poverty Liverpool was very much like New York, with the same sort of externalities and the same elbowing, heartless-looking crowd; and he sank into philosophy as he reflected that the man who lives in a nutshell has but little to see beyond it, since it is an epitome of the universe. The reflection is prophetic of the man who, after wandering through two worlds—the physical and the spiritual—spent the last thirty-five years of his life in a nutshell, having weighed the world and found it wanting. One grief, he wrote towards the end of *Redburn,* annuls ten thousand joys. But a little later, when the returning "Highlander", purged of fever by death, sailed into New York, his heart experienced the full resilience of youth; the ship he had loathed grew lovely in his eyes as he lingered over every familiar timber. "For the scene of suffering is a scene of joy when the suffering is past; and the silent reminiscence of hardships departed, is sweeter than the presence of delight."

Melville's real education began on the "Highlander" and in the streets of Liverpool. He had stepped from childhood to the world, from frugal seclusion to want, violence and disorder. In a few brief weeks of seafaring and loitering in the squalid parts of a shipping capital, he had learned perforce to shed his innocence and submit his spirit; and after his initiation he found himself back in America, changed from child to man, but with no clearer idea than he had before of his

path and opportunity in life. For a time he reverted to the commonplace, insecure life of a poor young man, and between 1837 and 1840 he was a teacher in schools in Albany and beginning his own training as a writer. His work as a teacher is obscure; at Pittsfield he is said to have boarded with the pupils' families, and was once obliged to confront a rising on the part of the pupils of the school by physical force—a task to which his experience as a sailor, and his rapid growth in stature and strength while at sea, must have made him easily competent. The obscurity of this part of his life is lifted a little by a reading of one or two surviving articles, which are included in the collected edition of Melville's works. The first of his identified contributions (1839) to the local press is characteristic, and characteristic, naturally, of his main fault—a rambling verbosity. His description of luxury in the second of these fragments might well have served him for a model of the description of the gaming-house in *Redburn;* the glamour of that magnificence must indeed have touched the senses of the young author, and it is probable that the whole London episode of the novel—so irrelevant and so tiresome—was only included by violence in order to preserve a memory which still affected him powerfully and which he had already embalmed in the somewhat tawdry texture of the *Democratic Press and Lansingburgh Advertiser.*

The articles are in the form of letters. He is smiling at himself, and very conscious of himself, when he assumes a disdain of "the little sneaking vermin" of the village street, who have never learned to walk erect; for the aristocracy of his mind, the disdain that is like the mere face and index of his

immense pride, is already expressed. His idealizing habit is here turned satirically against himself, but it is still himself that he has in mind; and what other subject is so sharply presented to the mind of any eager and unequipped writer? Forget the absence of a subject, and you will none the less note the fluency and fullness of the style: *a born writer!* you will say. His concern with a writer's beginnings is amply disclosed in *Pierre,* and on this subject at least the "ambiguities" of that book are few. Here Melville admits candidly enough the agonies of literary creation, in the case of the immature yet vehement creator. Certain things in *Pierre* may be questioned, as I have said, in their autobiographical application, but there is little ground for questioning that in avowing those creative agonies Melville was speaking of himself and even finding a perverse and hapless satisfaction in facing the crudities of his early foolish fervours. The books that Pierre Glendinning admired are the books that influenced Melville himself, as the scenes of Redburn's experience are the scenes of Melville's; the *Inferno* and *Hamlet* are conspicuous, and several pages of the story are occupied in telling of their influence upon Pierre in the crisis of his fate. "Dante had made him fierce, and *Hamlet* had insinuated that there was none to strike. . . . Their vacant covers mocked him with their idle titles." But the mere admiration of masterpieces does not enable a youth to beget masterpieces, and the available specimens of Melville's beginnings in literature do not indicate anything beyond the difficulties to be surmounted. A whole chapter of *Pierre* is given up to a satirical commentary upon "Young America in Literature", in the course of

which it is told that "Pierre himself had written many a fugitive thing, which had brought him, not only vast credit and compliments from his more immediate acquaintances, but the less partial applauses of the always intelligent, and extremely discriminating public. In short, Pierre had frequently done that, which many other boys have done—published." Melville heightens his account by saying that the young author's mind might well have been ruined with pride in the eulogies of his fugitive pieces, and the fact that even an echo of such eulogy of his own early attempts is lacking only reminds us yet again that Melville was a splendid fabulist and could not endure cramping by literal fact. Nevertheless, there are reliable signs that the general reference is to himself as a young author and the untowardness of his first attempts in an environment neither ripe enough nor crude enough to suit his immaturity. The pangs of first authorship, the exhilarations and despairs, are confessed in the person of this character, and the commoner pangs of want and cold and bodily exhaustion are described with at least an equal intensity. How closely he is following his own lost youth and his own fierce aspirations it is impossible to determine now, nor how much of exaggeration there is in the statement that Pierre "felt the pyramidical scorn of the genuine loftiness for the whole infinite company of infinitesimal critics". It is an after wisdom that speaks of the youth seeing, the deeper he dived, the everlasting elusiveness of truth, and the universal insincerity of the greatest and purest written thoughts; an after wisdom, for it is not in first youth that we make these private discoveries, and although Melville's experiences in his first voyage

had clearly killed some of his illusions, this chief illusion, if the term be granted, could not so soon have been lost. Even the perversity which he imputes to Pierre—the spurning of his own aspirations and the abhorring of the loftiest part of himself—was not Melville's at this time. Perversity overtook him later, but not yet, and in passages such as these the need of discrimination is greater than elsewhere. Looking back, he transferred his present, maturer knowledge and sombre judgement to the lad in his teens, and in the mere freedom and zest of imagination deepened the shadows and heightened the lights.

Even a commentator who refuses thus to discriminate, and who holds that in this strange and woeful book the author is not only portraying and denigrating his own parents, but is also revealing himself as a lost, hopeless soul, even a positive commentator will admit a difference in the conclusion. Pierre ends his privations of authorship and defeated idealism with murder and suicide, but Melville ends his obscure struggles by joining the crew of a whaler, the "Acushnet", at the beginning of 1841, when he was twenty-one years old.

CHAPTER II

POLYNESIA

For Melville's life between 1841, when he sailed in the "Acushnet", and 1844 when, after wanderings to and fro, in Atlantic and Pacific, after adventures on land and escapes to sea, he returned to Boston, the story is to be sought almost exclusively in the books he wrote as soon as he returned—*Typee, Omoo, White Jacket* and *Moby-Dick*. It is not a concentrated story, and there are frequent difficulties when an attempt is made to distinguish what is true in memory from what is true in imagination. Melville's love of pseudonymity is not a rare characteristic in imaginative artists, but it was very strongly marked in him and makes the task of outlining his life as uncertain as a shadow chasing a shadow. Maybe he subdued himself in order to exalt himself, but it is clear that he sought shadows rather than light and, in the absence of recognition, proudly invested himself with obscurity.

It has been suggested by one who knew Melville, Arthur Stedman, that the impulse to sea-roving was given by the publication in 1840 of Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast*. Restless he must have been, but I doubt whether the spirit of adventure was strong

enough to lead him to join a whaler; and I doubt whether Melville was ever deeply stirred by the curiosity which seeks satisfaction in movement and spectacle. He was introspective and seldom showed a desire to visit the unfamiliar and explore his own ignorance. The curiosity that led him to visit Palestine, his farthest voluntary visit, was abstract and philosophical and might have been almost completely satisfied by staying at home. This, however, was much later in his life, and when he wrote *White Jacket* he set himself to telling only of what took place on board, and does not hint at the least temptation to let his thoughts stray ashore. His impulse to whaling was much more direct and definite—the desire to make a living independently; and if a further impulse be discerned it was the desire for isolation amid activity, and silent remoteness for years, perhaps, from all that had made youth painful and manhood perplexed. He fled from the city to the desert where, if once his comrades were silent, the waves and the wind spoke.

Mr. Weaver confirms the statement that it was in the "Acushnet" that Melville sailed by referring to the journal of Mrs. Melville and other documents. It was the "Acushnet's" first voyage. This ship has been identified with the "Pequod" of *Moby-Dick*, that sailed, according to its wonderful author, from about the same spot at about the same time. Part of the identification was contrived by fate, since it has been pointed out that the "Acushnet" was lost in 1851, within a month of Melville ending his tragical history of her shadow-sister, the "Pequod".

The course of Melville's voyages may be briefly drawn. The "Acushnet" sailed in 1841 and returned

more than four years later, loaded with oil. But Melville did not return with her. In the summer of 1842, with a solitary companion Toby (Richard Tobias Greene), he deserted after fifteen months of hardships and inward discontent, while the ship lay off Nukuheva, the chief place and port of the Marquesas, then (and still) under French rule. Contact with European civilization had not proved beneficial to the moral or physical condition of the islanders, and when Melville's ship arrived and was taken possession of by native women, who in turn yielded so easily to the whaler's crew, the stricter soul of one sailor at least was revolted. Melville, nevertheless, was prepared to confront the unknown on shore rather than endure any longer the known hardships of the "Acushnet"—the bad food, the capricious voyage, the tyranny of the captain and his neglect of the sick. Six months without sight of land and then the sudden vision of the Marquesas Islands had made his inward discontents unbearable; and finding that "Toby" shared them he determined to desert and hide until the ship had left, and then take his chance of another ship. He spent four months on the island, practically a prisoner among natives who were not violently unkind but detained him, he feared, that they might eat. Part of the time he spent alone, for "Toby" had gone to seek medicines which might cure Melville's lameness and these could be got only from a French ship that hovered at Nukuheva. Toby was to return in three days, and in the first agony of apprehension Melville believed that the friend he loved had deserted him in order to secure his own freedom. It was not so: "Toby" had reached the French ship and was able to make

plans for Melville's escape, but not able to see them carried out. The French ship sailed, and Melville, when the messenger told him, thought he would never see "Toby" again; indeed, it was the publication of *Typee*, in 1846, that brought him news of his old comrade and enabled him to complete his story with a sequel giving "Toby's" adventures. It was a great joy to our author, for Richard Tobias Greene was one of the earliest of his few friends. On the "Acushnet" the two had solaced their uncomfortable hours "with chat, song and story, mingled with a good many imprecations upon the hard destiny it seemed our common fortune to encounter. Toby, like myself, had evidently moved in a different sphere of life, and his conversation at times betrayed this, though he was anxious to conceal it. He was one of that class of rovers you sometimes meet at sea, who never reveal their origin, never allude to home, and go rambling over the world as if pursued by some mysterious fate they cannot possibly elude". In the main the crew were dastardly and mean-spirited wretches, and among them "Toby" shone like a bright flame out of foul smoke. After the publication of *Typee* and the discovery that Greene was still alive, Melville received from him a lock of his hair—a portrait of 1846 shows how abundant it was and how "romantic" was Greene's appearance then. Later he became a journalist and editor, and in the Civil War was a clerk at Grant's Headquarters. Whether the early attachment faded with time I do not know, but Mr. Weaver is able to quote a letter from Greene, ten years after *Typee* was published, saying how proud he felt because of the immortality bestowed on him

in that book. He sought to return it by naming his son Herman Melville Greene, and other letters followed.

It was assuredly a bold thing of the friends to desert the "Acushnet" for an island which, as Melville knew, was a home of cannibals. The very name *Typee*, he says, in the Marquesan dialect signifies a lover of human flesh; and he himself was to discover that the open vices acquired from Europeans had not driven out the secret vice of cannibalism. He had heard of an English crew which, ignorant of the people, had been lured into the bay and murdered; yet the immediate oppression of the whaler seemed more intolerable than the danger of being devoured. He even excuses the bloody islanders, because of the crimes practised against them by foreigners; it is thus, he declares, that those called savages are taught to deserve the name. "When the inhabitants of some sequestered island first descry the 'big canoe' of the European rolling through the blue waters toward their shores, they rush down to the beach in crowds, and with open arms stand ready to embrace the strangers. Fatal embrace! They fold to their bosoms the vipers whose sting is destined to poison all their joys; and the instinctive feeling of love within their breasts is soon converted into the bitterest hate. The enormities perpetrated in the South Seas upon some of the inoffensive islanders well-nigh pass belief." It is consoling to reflect that Melville's indictment was written so long ago as 1846.

His own treatment by the Typees, as he recites it, was not at all unreasonably harsh—an indulgent captivity is his phrase—nor is his judgement of them

anywhere severe; and when his apprehensions were quenched by his escape, and he tasted again the miseries of a whaler, he had reason to wonder which evil was the greater. It was an Australian whaler named, or disguised by Melville as, the "Julia", and it was because she needed men rather than because a sailor was in distress that the captain was willing to delay until Melville was aboard. A small, slatternly-looking craft, very old, everything denoting an ill state of affairs, a wild, haggard crew—few prospects could be less inviting than a sojourn of unknown length in such a ship; but in the delirium of escape he was not too critical and signed on for one cruise with the understanding that he could, if he wished, claim his discharge at the next port. The captain was a landsman, the chief mate a toper, and the doctor, Long Ghost, had been banished to the forecastle for striking the captain. Half the men were sick and the food was abominable, and the captain only kept the ship at sea because if he landed he would probably lose all the crew. The crews manning such vessels as the "Julia" were, says Melville, mostly villains, port-sweepings, to be governed by scourges and chains; when two of the "Julia's" men died of their vices, they were tossed into the sea without ceremony, partly because there was neither Bible nor prayer-book to use for ceremony. The ship reached Tahiti—a fairy world it seemed to Melville as his eyes yearned towards this New Cytherea, as the French called it; but his eyes could do no more than yearn remotely, for the captain alone was to go on shore and leave the turbulent crew at sea until his return. And since, for a time at least, the chief mate was to be with the captain on shore, the ship was

committed to the charge of a dark moody savage, Bembo, a harpooner—man or devil as you will, adds our narrator.

At this the men were transported with anger, and resolved to send a round-robin to the English Consul by Baltimore, the cook, notifying their grievances and claiming redress. So ill-furnished was the ship that no paper nor ink could be found, and it was necessary to tear two blank leaves from an old volume pleasantly entitled *A History of the Most Atrocious and Bloody Piracies,* before Melville was able to act as scribe for the crew and indict the story of their afflictions. For answer the Consul's deputy came on board, harangued them, and declared that they should put to sea again under the mate's command and return for their captain three months later. Disorder provoked mutiny, the "Julia" was anchored in the bay after an attempt at wrecking by Bembo, and the Consul's deputy arrested the mutineers, including Melville, and despatched them handcuffed to a French ship, the "Reine Blanche", for Valparaiso; subsequently, however, they were returned to shore and cast into jail. Repeated attempts were made to get them to resume duty on the "Julia", but they steadily refused, and after three weeks she sailed with a fresh crew, leaving Melville and the rest in mild confinement.

After more weeks, which our author employed in noting with unsympathetic acuteness the influence of civilization and missions upon native weakness, Melville and the doctor, Long Ghost, succeeded in getting removed to another island, Imeeo, to work on the plantations in the valley of Martair. Soon the irksome tasks and languid climate made them long for

idleness again, and they left for Tamai, a lonely inland settlement; but in the midst of their dreams of staying there indefinitely they were driven forth once more by the rumour of missionary interference. Melville's wanderings with Long Ghost make a pleasant story—so pleasant that the two seem to be tramping in modern fashion through a tourist-haunted island, until news of a ship in the harbour of Taloo took them eagerly thither. It was the "Leviathan", a whaler, and their appearance, and anxiety to ship, caused a good deal of curiosity. "Be off," cried one of the crew; "they murther us here every day, and starve us into the bargain." This unfriendly witness discouraged the exiles, but they were weary of isolation; not even the pleasure of visiting Po-Po, a native deacon of the church, as Melville calls him, and one of the only two true Christians he had ever met among all the natives of Polynesia, nor even the pleasure of finding three of Smollett's novels in Po-Po's possession—a rare, impossible joy—could assuage that weariness. The "Leviathan" was abused by her crew, who wanted to terrify new hands with stories of hardships, so that the ship might lie the longer in that pleasant harbour. Other accounts, however, were far more agreeable: a cosier old craft never floated, the captain was the finest man in the world, food was abundant, and there was little to do. True she was a luckless ship, for whales escaped her though harpooned; but what of that? Above all, the "Leviathan" was on her last cruise, and in little more than a year would be sailing round Cape Horn.

The captain was a native of Nantucket, and his suspicions of Melville were banished when he discovered that the exile was an American; but Long

Ghost remained a suspect, the captain persisting that he was a jail-bird from Sydney. For his part the doctor was not ill-inclined to remain a while on the island, and so Melville alone, breaking away from the kind-hearted Po-Po and Arfretee his wife, hurried down to the ship. "As he stepped over the side, I shook the doctor long and heartily by the hand. I have never seen or heard of him since. Crowding all sail, we braced the yards square; and, the breeze freshening, bowled straight away from the land. Once more the sailor's cradle rocked under me, and I found myself rolling in my gait. By noon, the island had gone down in the horizon, and all before us was the wide Pacific."

The identity of Doctor Long Ghost has not been established. He was a remarkable creature and, as we shall be noting in a later chapter, as entertaining a companion as could be wished. Melville and the doctor, despite the obvious difference in their stations, had become friends and played chess with pieces carved by their own hands. Long Ghost disappeared from Melville's story when the Lilliputian "Leviathan" drew away from the island, and he leaves us wondering who it was that could become so familiar and friendly a figure in Melville's life, and then be forgotten so completely, as if he had never lived and the two companions had never faced hardships together.

To follow Melville's course when he joined the "Leviathan" is not quite a simple matter. He sailed in the latter part of 1842, but he does not say for what port (merely crying, Hurrah for the coast of Japan), and *Omoo* ends abruptly with the departure from Tahiti; nor does he tell anywhere of the cruise of the

"Leviathan" and his experiences on board. A brief light is cast upon his career a little later by Rear-Admiral Franklin, who, in 1896, published his reminiscences and included a rather doubtful recollection of Melville. He says that Melville was among the seamen picked up from the Consul at Tahiti by the captain of a man-of-war, the "United States"; and although he has nothing particular to tell of him, "occasionally will flash across my memory a maintop-man flitting across about the starboard gangway with a white jacket on". Franklin remembers far more distinctly Jack Chase, the hero of *White Jacket*, and he is able to certify the truthfulness of the pseudonymous portraits which Melville crowded into his account of life on an American warship, the "Neversink", as he preferred to call her. Melville himself says that he joined her as an ordinary seaman in 1843, from a harbour in the Pacific, and was discharged more than a year later with the rest of the crew on her arrival home. Mr. Arthur Stedman in his biographical notes reports that between his service on the "Leviathan" and his joining the "United States" Melville worked for a time as a clerk at Honolulu, and this, perhaps, was the harbour from which, as "White Jacket", he joined the "United States".

Melville's life on an American man-of-war is set forth in *White Jacket*, a story of obvious and almost laborious literality. There are dark passages in it, but the shadows do but heighten, by an unconscious cunning, the affectionate portrait of Jack Chase, "first captain of the top". Of no other man does he speak with such admiration and love, finding in him something heroic yet all human. An educated man, wise

as Ulysses, shining as Nelson, azure-eyed, bright-hearted—"wherever you may now be rolling over the blue billows, dear Jack, take my best love along with you; and God bless you, wherever you go". Years after, when, just before his death, Melville finished a belated brief masterpiece, *Billy Budd,* he dedicated it to "Jack Chase, Englishman, wherever that great heart may now be, here on earth or harboured in paradise". It was Jack Chase and his own devoted discipleship that made Melville's experience on the "United States" a tolerable and even a happy experience, sweetening what was sour with long talks and intellectual rovings through heaven and earth. A lesser friendship helped, that of a comrade named Nord, to whom his heart warmed when he saw in his eye that he was a lover of good books. The man was a marvel, he cries: no sailor, utterly ignorant of ships, the officers nevertheless respected him, and the men were afraid of him. How came he to be there? Like Long Ghost he had fallen, but not a syllable would he tell of his past, though on the first night of mutual unburdening "we scoured all the prairies of reading, dived into the bosoms of authors, tore out their hearts". That night, in that single intimate colloquy, Melville learned more than he ever did in a single night since.

If Melville found life tolerable on the "United States" it was largely because of his friendships, for there was a greal deal to tolerate. Even in contrast with the hardships of a whaler—and he found it wise to conceal his whaler's life from the prying of his shipmates—the conditions of the crew were harsh and oppressive; and for these he blames the tyranny of

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captain and officers, and the tyranny of naval laws, almost equally. But of all hardships there was none that revolted him like flogging: even to see it, drawn up with the crew by compulsion while the strokes were laid on the flesh of a ship-mate, was an agony, a humiliation, an outrage. Men known to be in consumption had been scourged on the "United States", with the surgeon standing by to measure their strength; an aged seaman had been flogged in spite of a spotless character because he refused to sacrifice his venerable grey beard at the captain's whim. Is it lawful to scourge a man that is a Roman? he cries, using the appeal of the Apostle. "And now, eighteen hundred years after, is it lawful for you, my countrymen, to scourge a man that is an American?—to scourge him round the world in your frigates?" Melville was revolted that any American seaman should be flogged, and still more that he should be flogged for trivial offences and on slight charges, by the mere caprice of an almighty captain; and when, for no offence, he himself, looking forward to freedom and home, was ordered a flogging, anger made him demented. There are times, he says, when wild thoughts enter a man's heart, when he seems almost irresponsible for his act and his deed. He looked at the captain, while the boatswain stood curling his fingers through the *cat*. "I stood a little to windward of the captain, and, though he was a large, powerful man, it was certain that a sudden rush against him, along the slanting deck, would infallibly pitch him head-foremost into the ocean, though he who so rushed must needs go over with him. My blood seemed clotting in my veins; I felt icy cold at the tips of my fingers, and a dimness

was before my eyes. But through that dimness the boatswain's mate, scourge in hand, loomed like a giant, and Captain Claret, and the blue sea seen through the opening at the gangway, showed with an awful vividness. I cannot analyse my heart, though it then stood still within me. But the thing that swayed me to my purpose was not altogether the thought that Captain Claret was about to degrade me, and that I had taken an oath with my soul that he should not. No, I felt my man's manhood so bottomless within me, that no word, no blow, no scourge of Captain Claret could cut me deep enough for that. I but swung to an instinct in me—the instinct diffused through all animated nature, the same that prompts even a worm to turn under the heel. Locking souls with him, I meant to drag Captain Claret from this earthly tribunal of his to that of Jehovah, and let Him decide between us. No other way could I escape the scourge."

It was only by the audacious intervention of noble Jack Chase that Melville escaped flogging and his captain death, and that moment's intense apprehension remained like a red star in his mind. In such a passage as this Herman Melville is writing, as nowhere else, his spirit's autobiography, as painfully, as burningly, as Saint Augustine wrote his. The profound, dark depth of his nature is revealed as it was seldom revealed, the powerful involuntary suppressions are burst through, and the primal passion underlying the passions of love and hate springs into sight; and anon, with the escape, it sinks back again and Melville becomes once more the ordinary seaman, with that burning star screened from all other eyes. But the experience was never forgotten, and the nearness of

his own humiliation then quickened his denunciation of flogging. Rear-Admiral Franklin declares that *White Jacket* had more influence than anything else in abolishing corporal punishment in the Navy. The book was placed on the desk of every member of Congress, and a law was passed soon after, abolishing flogging in the Navy without substituting any other mode of punishment.

It is right to remember here that while Melville had denounced the abhorrent practice in the United States Navy, Dana had previously displayed a yet more wanton instance of brutal tyranny on a merchant ship.

White Jacket, the book to which we owe all our knowledge of Melville's life in the American Navy, receives its title from the white jacket which he contrived for himself as a protection against wind and rain, a strange, cumbrous garment, execrated by the rest of the crew because it must needs bring bad luck to the ship. It was to its owner that it brought bad luck when, one calm night, he was ordered aloft and the heaving ship disturbed his hold just when the heavy skirts of that detested jacket were thrown over his head; and he was pitched from the yard. "I knew where I was, from the rush of the air by my ears, but all else was a nightmare. A bloody film was before my eyes, through which, ghost-like, passed and repassed my father, mother and sisters. An unutterable nausea oppressed me; I was conscious of gasping; there seemed no breath in my body. It was over one hundred feet that I fell—down, down, with lungs collapsed as in death. . . . All I had seen, and read, and heard, and all I had thought and felt

in my life, seemed intensified in one fixed idea in my soul." The sensations of drowning, of physical nausea and spiritual exaltation, are rendered with singular power in the course of a prolonged passage of heightened prose. As the immediate fear of drowning passed and he found himself hampered chiefly by the white jacket, he was able to rip it from his body and move more freely in the water. The floating jacket, in the faint light of the night, was taken for a shark by the crew who peered out for their comrade, and the harpoons they flung at their enemy pierced it and sank it in the sea. It was near the end of this romantic history of a cruise in the "United States" that the episode occurred, Melville in his account aptly placing the loss of the jacket for symbol of a lost world of activity; and he ends the history on a note of lyrical delight, farewells all said, injuries forgotten. "Our last death-denouncing Article of War has been read; and far inland, in that blessed clime whitherward our frigate now glides, the last wrong in our frigate will be remembered no more; when down from our mainmast comes our commodore's pennant, when down sink its shooting stars from the sky. 'By the mark, nine!' sings the hoary old leadsman, in the chains. And thus, the mid-world equator passed, our frigate strikes soundings at last."

It was in October 1844, after an absence of between three and four years, that Herman Melville returned in his ship to Boston, where her last voyage ended and his valedictory was breathed over her ancient timbers before they were committed to the ship-breakers. For between three and four years he had been absorbed in the busy external world, the

world of ships and savages, and it is, indeed, almost a happy unembarrassed man that is revealed in *Typee*, *Omoo* and *White Jacket*. He was little more than twenty-one when he joined the "Acushnet"; his brief experience on the "Highlander" and visit to England had shown him as unpractised in the world, while his life at home and as a schoolmaster had not, so far as may be discovered now, served to give a very sharp edge to his natural simplicity. But his life on whalers and a man-of-war, and his wanderings among Pacific islands, where white men were few in number and doubtful in character, had taught him much that he could not have learned otherwise. He had seen more of men, of common labouring men, of ill-livers, rogues and wastrels, of abusers and abused, white and dusky, civilized and savage; he had become acquainted with the evil of the world, to a degree which home-keeping people cannot easily appreciate, being content to doubt what they have not themselves encountered. The soul of goodness in things evil was discernible by his charitable eyes; he was still young, and incapable of cynicism, especially of our modern cynicism of cleverness. The warmth of his response to the warmth of Jack Chase, his appreciation of the christianity of Po-Po and Arfretee, his anger at the humiliation of man by man, his demand for humanity among men and laws—all exhibit him as a natural, unwarped, unsophisticated being. The other being that was hidden within him, the spirit of genius that was about to spring full-grown from his side, was until then lying inactive and unstirring, not even faintly pressing on his consciousness. He came back to Boston a man, trembling with the bigness of a

harvest of which no one as yet could see the green beginnings.

And above all that he had gained from commerce with others, was the faculty which he preserved of his own—the faculty of contemplation. In truth, as has already been said, he was not a man of action, he was not a wanderer though at times he travelled as age grew on him. The restlessness that urges others abroad to see the world, urged him now to stay at home and contemplate it: there or nowhere was his America. He ended his wanderings awhile when he stepped on shore from the "United States", and began them anew in his mind, a darker and more secret world. He was only twenty-five, but his reserved nature hourly deepened with all suppressions, and the "reserves" themselves became as a well which he was soon to tap at will and which, with all that was drawn, did but sink deeper and yield a colder water. Already that colder temperature could be felt, and traced to something puritanic in his race. With the removal of his unconscious self-control, as in the scene with Captain Claret, the secret fury of his nature is liberated; but ordinarily the instinctive repression of strong passions was almighty, and the face that he presented to the world in his day, and to us still, is a mask. He could not have worn it so calmly if he had always worn it consciously, but as we said just now, his repression was instinctive and instinct was reinforced by training, example, and the discipline of a life in which no man could afford to wear his heart on his sleeve. When he wrote of himself at this time he slipped now and again by chance into a less guarded expression, and what tran-

spires is a simple, natural religiousness of heart. Then as later, his christianity appeared as a living thing, and it is significant that so many of his references to Jesus Christ—and all are not many, though passionate—are to Him as the Redeemer; consciousness of what was ill within, of weakness, fear and lack of love, taught him to look to one who might redeem man from weakness and coldness and give him a stabler heart. "To be efficacious, Virtue must come down from aloft, even as our blessed Redeemer came down to redeem our whole man-of-war world; to that end, mixing with its sailors and sinners as equals."

But peace and serenity were never or not yet his. At the age of twenty-five these are gifts not to be prized, characters not to be looked for. At that age Melville was already developing the temperament which would make peace and serenity difficult if not quite impossible. Nevertheless, when he was discharged from the Navy he was discharged into liberty, and liberty, combined with a memory of the happier accidents of the years away from home, gave him a sense of something sweet and exquisite in life.

As I have remarked, the material for Melville's life between 1841 and 1844 is found in three straightforward narratives. There are two other books based on the experiences of these years, *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick,* but to assume any biographical veracity in these would be foolish. The former is a dream-like illumination of fancies in the margin of fact—a little fact capriciously related, and a gorgeous illumination of the text, a parable, allegory or parallel; and the latter is an overwhelming recollection of visions and

the creations of the spirit. They could not have been written save for Melville's own experience of seas and lands, ships and crews, but no memoir of their author can be based upon them. There is no foothold even for speculation.

CHAPTER III

RETURN TO AMERICA—MELVILLE AND HAWTHORNE

Mellville's mother was still living in Lansingburgh, Albany, when Herman returned home in 1844, and his brothers were gaining success in politics, law and what not. Mr. Weaver reports him as "effulgent" with stories that made his return incredible and glorious. The impulse to authorship may have come partly from without, but it certainly came mainly from within; the born romantic, the poet, the artist, need no spurring, assuredly not that of circumstance that thwarts as often as it promotes. Before he had been home two years his first book, *Typee,* was written, despatched to England by the offices of his elder brother Gansevoort and accepted by John Murray. Murray bought the English rights and printed a thousand copies, Melville receiving a hundred pounds. It was published in two volumes of Murray's "Colonial and Home Library," as a truthful account of personal experiences. In New York it was published with a slightly different title, and both in England and America received praise from many and censure from some. The praise was due to the pure delightfulness of the narration, and the censure to Melville's denunciation of missions and the

ill effects of contact between civilized and savage beings. Three years later the objections prevailed, and *Typee* was reissued in an emasculated form for the benefit of those in whom prejudice is supreme; the pleasantness of the narrative is not much diminished by this mutilation, but its integrity is destroyed. *Typee,* as three generations of American readers have perforce been content to read it, and as it has been reprinted in England of recent years,[1] is not Melville's book, but Melville's minus that which perturbed a dozen or a thousand obstinate, apprehensive readers.

Twelve months after *Typee* came *Omoo,* to share success and opprobrium with his predecessor. American writers did not always find favour with English readers, and both appreciation and money were welcome to the author. Success in the esteem of a few, success as a master of narrative, could not of itself feed and clothe him and remove him from the fear of penury, and it became the more necessary that he should make money when he contemplated marriage. Poe was still alive, and although he was well known in his own country and already begetting a trembling in the pulse of French poetry, his circumstances were as lamentable as ever. If Melville had ever heard of Poe, his reputation and his temporal distress, he could not have been comforted, for his own income fell short of his reputation and of his imminent necessities.

Typee was dedicated to Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw of Massachusetts. As a young man he had been engaged to an aunt of Melville's, and the intimacy between the two families which was thus created survived the early death of this lady. Hence Melville

[1] The Standard Edition (Constable) prints the full text.

was able to write to the Chief Justice, sending him one of the earliest copies of *Typee,* and refer in the dedication to "my father's friend and the constant friend of all his family". Elizabeth Shaw's name creeps into the latter part of this letter, and not much more than a year later Melville had married her, and she was writing to his mother telling of the honeymoon and the journey to Concord and the White Mountains. They returned to Lansingburgh for a time and then removed to New York, joining the household of Allan Melville and his sisters. Elizabeth Shaw Melville is not a very clear figure now, but her attractive portrait and letters suggest a quality of mind, a tenderness and attentiveness, of which not even the most engrossed writer could be insensible. She speaks of Herman's habits, his work, and his walks and talks, how he does not use his eyes much by candle-light, but plays cards or listens to reading. While Herman is writing, the effect of late hours is very injurious, for without a full night's rest he feels unfit for work the next day, and the days are too precious to be thrown away. If he goes to parties it is to please her more than himself, but she is contented to stay at home so long as he will stay with her. London publishers have made him liberal offers for his next book (presumably *Mardi* or *Redburn*), and Berlin publishers want to translate it into German.

The fruit of his activity was seen in 1849, when *Mardi* was published with a preface dated January 1849, which said that his two narratives of voyages having been received with incredulity in many quarters, it occurred to him to write a confessed romance of Polynesian adventure. He wanted to see whether his

fiction might not be received for a verity. *Mardi,* so high-fantastical, was followed in a few months by *Redburn,* so literal and workaday. The latter proved more immediately popular, as was indeed likely, for the Defoe-like straightforwardness of *Redburn,* though marred by a single prolonged episode, is a more attractive quality than the waywardness of *Mardi,* which begets impatience and provokes question with all but a loyal intellectual aristocracy. But had these books been far more popular they would still have done little beyond satisfying Melville's necessities, for by this time his first child was born, and his income from books was encumbered by debts to the publishers.

He had published four books in three years, using his reserves of experience freely enough, and then sinking for his material into the mysterious, uncertain depths of the imaginative life. He had made reputation, but fortune was still to make; and now at the age of thirty, a husband and father, he was driven to leave America for England with the manuscript of a fifth book, *White Jacket.* He sailed on the "Southampton", and discoursed much with a German scholar, Adler, to whom he was introduced by one of the Duyckinck brothers; the latter were friends of Melville and were responsible for a Cyclopaedia which contained an account of his early life. With Adler, he says, he talked philosophy, and found him full of German metaphysics; the names of Kant, Schlegel, Hegel, Swedenborg, and Coleridge tripped upon their tongues, and he admits, in his own person, a concern with philosophy which he had hitherto shown only indirectly or dramatically. The meditative, wandering

mind was touching at dangerous ports, where others had stayed for years bemused—ports hung with drowsy clouds; and he indulged a tendency to speculation on the most abstract of themes and the most insecure of ideas. Another direct result of conversations on board the "Southampton" was that he formed plans for a tour to Palestine, Greece and Egypt. "I am full (just now) of this glorious Eastern jaunt. Think of it:—Jerusalem and the Pyramids—Constantinople, the Aegean and also Athens!" The fulfilment of this dream was deferred, but, as will be noted, when the dream was at length realized the journey was essentially a mental rather than a physical one; he moved, as he remained still, in order that he might think—a mental traveller, truly. He discussed this tour eagerly, and between whiles talked for hours again and again upon high metaphysical themes; and then would become suddenly aware that in a little while he would again be pressing English earth after an absence of ten years—*then* a sailor and now the author of four books. His journal of the visit to England and the travelling through English counties shows a fondness of touch as though here and not yonder was his true home; but nothing is so eloquent as a brief phrase written before he landed—"Thro' these waters Blake's and Nelson's ships once sailed". The feeling of "home", nevertheless, did not displace the feeling for his own America; of his few confessed occasions for pride one was certainly the consciousness, expressed often enough, that as an American he was a citizen of no mean city.

The brief journal was continued while he stayed in England, and affords hints of his pleasure in London,

his impressions of his publisher, Bentley, his occasional homesickness, and his attendance at the hanging of the Mannings, husband and wife side by side, still unreconciled—"What a change from the time they stood up to be married together! The mob was brutish. All in all, a most wonderful, horrible and unspeakable scene." Melville used his own experiences freely enough in his books, but this vivid nightmarish scene, which he could not but remember, he never used. He tried various publishers, with *White Jacket,* anxious to get as much as he could for it, but they were civil and silent, or civil and loquacious—Moxon babbled how he had often put Lamb to bed, drunk—but alike disinclined to exceed the offer of the first one approached, Bentley, who was willing to pay £200 for the first English edition. He dipped warily in the social whirlpool, and met Lockhart, a considerable figure then; "I refrained from playing the snob to him, like the rest, and the consequence was he grinned at me his ghastly smiles. . . . Oh, Conventionalism, what a ninny thou art!"

Melville, suddenly restless, left London for Paris and thereby prepared himself for one of the best passages in *Israel Potter*; then Paris for Brussels, and so on to Germany, where he remembered that America and his wife were some four thousand miles away, and that he must soon be homeward bound. But he had to take England in his way, and one reference suggests that he was almost in danger of being lionized; for he recalls among other such matters, perhaps not without a natural satisfaction, that the Duke of Rutland asked him to visit Belvoir Castle before he left for America. He did not go,

but found a more substantial gratification by arranging definitely for the publication of *White Jacket*; none the less, he felt that he was missing a chance of seeing the highest English aristocracy as in itself it really is, and the loss touched him. What all the time was touching him more, however, was the separation from his family. "Would that one I knew were here. Would that the Little One too were here." When he could endure the separation no longer he took passage in a ship named "Independence", the captain of which asked if he were related to Gansevoort and Herman Melville; and while waiting for it to sail he meandered about London, haunting streets and ships, and reading De Quincey's *Opium Eater*. It is remarkable that he was not already familiar with that curious, unique masterpiece, for there are passages in *Mardi*, for instance, which seem to bear traces of contact between Melville's spirit and that lofty, irregular spirit of De Quincey's. It is equally strange that he read *Tristram Shandy* in London for the first time, for surely his own habit of digression might be attributed in part to Sterne. It is not, at any rate, a very wide hazard if I suggest that both the *Opium Eater* and *Tristram Shandy* exercised a considerable influence upon his subsequent work; *Moby-Dick* is the abundant proof. Other books bought in London at this time include folio copies of Jonson, Browne, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Marlowe, guides and maps for *Israel Potter*, the merely fantastic *Vathek* and the satirical *Hudibras*. His books reflect his own sympathies—Browne and the Elizabethan dramatists appear constantly as an influence in some of his writings—his intellectual appetites were keen and intemperate, and his narratives,

whether literal or imaginative, help to redeem the sailor from a charge of illiteracy.

Melville, his journal and his books reached New York in February 1850. A few months later he removed with his family to Pittsfield, in the region of the Berkshire Hills, Massachusetts, and in the autumn bought an old farm-house for his future home and named it Arrowhead. Here for some years he was to combine authorship with farming, in a vain attempt to live prosperously. It was a pleasant spot, and for Melville was charged with a singular felicity, for it was here that his uncle had lived and his own childhood had stored up memories and associations during repeated summer visits; hence his settlement now was in a sense a re-establishment and restoration. There was another felicity in the choice of Pittsfield, it being made about the same time that Hawthorne also moved to the neighbourhood and settled at Lenox, a picturesque Berkshire town and summer haunt of literary men. Melville was not yet thirty-one, Hawthorne forty-six; Melville was known as the author of certain books which had provoked a good deal of acrimony, and Hawthorne had published *The Scarlet Letter*. For neither of them had success been very considerable or remunerative, and when they met the older man might have envied the younger, and the younger admired the achievement of the older, with equal reason. It was not until they were neighbours that they met. For the first time a certain kindly, intimate resource became available to Melville, and he could, when he would, enjoy a healthy association with his fellow in creative art. Hitherto this had been lacking, but his natural tendency to solitary intro-

spection could now be checked by human companionship, and a needed relief from intense labour found in the ease and stimulation of talk.

Of Melville's methods as a writer little is known, but the quick succession of his books up to this time, and indeed later, proves that he was capable of prodigious energy and concentration. In six years he had written six considerable narratives and fictions, and now at Pittsfield he began *Moby-Dick*—no filigree fantasy, no sparing distillation, but an outpouring of his vital powers sustained at enormous length. He would sit at his desk all day, his wife says, not writing anything till four or five o'clock; he knew, in fact, the painful pauses and hesitations of creation, the despairing lapses and slow renewals. When he had finished his task his anxieties still survived. He wrote to Hawthorne: "Since you have been here I have been building some shanties of houses (connected with the old one) and likewise some shanties of chapters and essays. I have been ploughing and sowing and raising and printing and praying, and now begin to come out upon a less bristling time, and to enjoy the calm prospect of things from a fair piazza at the north of the old farm-house here.

"Not entirely yet, though, am I without something to be urgent with. *The Whale* is only half through the press; for, wearied with the long delays of the printers, and disgusted with the heat and dust of the Babylonish brick-kiln of New York, I came back to the country to feel the grass, and end the book reclining on it if I may." He had gone to New York to work and slave on *The Whale* while it was driving through the press, for it seemed at the moment that

only so could he finish it, pulled hither and thither as he was by circumstances. "The calm, the coolness, the silent grass-growing mood in which a man *ought* always to compose,—that, I fear, can seldom be mine. Dollars damn me; and the malicious Devil is for ever grinning in upon me, holding the door ajar." Domesticity was not a perfect refuge for his inquietude, and it was out of such misgivings, fervour and anguish that his masterpiece was produced. And out of these, too, mingling or intermitting, a mortified pride speaks: he girds at the world, at reputation, at the insecurity of men's creations, and all the while nurses an unconquerable hope. He wrote freely to Hawthorne, eager for intimacy and, as reserved men must needs be, burning with a desire for confession and self-revelation. Here was his elder and his equal, here was another creator, cool and apparently serene; he cannot restrain himself when once the gates are raised, but streams with a candour and fullness all the stronger for many suppressions.

How far Hawthorne responded it is not easy, or essential, to know. Melville had been drawn to Hawthorne's genius before he met him, and had written an astonishingly fervid appreciation of *The Scarlet Letter, Twice Told Tales* and *Mosses from an Old Manse*, for the *Literary World*. Seldom has a writer praised a contemporary with more ardour; he speaks of "the soft ravishments of the man", of the Indian-summer sunlight on one side of Hawthorne and the blackness ten-times black on the other, and of the great power of the blackness; and he proudly vindicates American literature against ignorant disregard by his assertion of Hawthorne's greatness.

Hawthorne must have glowed—or been shamed—with gratification; but it needed an accidental meeting and two hours' "enforced intercourse" during a kindly thunderstorm to reveal each to the other. The outpourings seem to have been Melville's more than Hawthorne's, for the latter had reached an age when the inhibitions of a saturnine temperament become all-powerful. Hawthorne's singular genius did not ask for space and light, but for darkness and oblivion, for soundless burrows, damp basements, where simple sins grow fungus-like and nature becomes unnatural. His task as a creative artist was to bring to light whatever was hidden, the blanched, monstrous domestic growths; but it was a pallid light or twilight in which he showed them with feminine tremors and delicate revulsions, his own attitude giving half its grace to the story. That he possessed, and was only half-unconscious of, an influence over Melville is to us unmistakable; and it is not surprising if the more delicate writer has power over the stronger. The difference in age and in character, the apparent security and tranquillity of Hawthorne's life, were very likely to impress Melville, and a natural admiration of *The Scarlet Letter* disposed the younger man to recognize the essential fineness of his new friend's mind. *I and my Chimney,* a short story of 1856, is an example of Melville writing like Hawthorne—the same fond domestic interior rendered with a hundred light egotistic touches. Melville does not subdue his mind even when he subdues his manner to Hawthorne's influence; his extravagance of feeling and expression, that grew upon him after *Redburn,* were not easily checked; but none the less, in his choice of subject and meditative gyrations he

writes, in certain of the shorter pieces, with Hawthorne's diligent, queer shade at his elbow.

Except for a preoccupation with the problem of evil, which his elder may have stimulated, there is small sign of Hawthorne's influence upon Melville's masterpiece, *Moby-Dick*, although this was written while contact with Hawthorne was most frequent. For the moment, however, we must note Melville's own letters in estimating the strength of the intimacy between the two. "I mean to continue visiting you", he writes to Hawthorne, "until you tell me that my visits are both supererogatory and superfluous. With no son of man do I stand upon any etiquette or ceremony, except the Christian ones of charity and honesty. I am told, my fellow-man, that there is an aristocracy of the brain. . . . And I can well perceive, I think, how a man of superior mind can, by its intense cultivation, bring himself, as it were, into a certain spontaneous aristocracy of feeling—exceedingly nice and fastidious—similar to that which, in an English Howard, conveys a torpedo-fish thrill at the slightest contact with a social plebeian. So, when you see or hear of my ruthless democracy on all sides, you may possibly feel a touch of a shrink, or something of that sort. It is but nature to be shy of a mortal who boldly declares that a thief in jail is as honourable a person as Gen. George Washington. This is ludicrous. But Truth is the silliest thing under the sun. Try to get a living by Truth—and go to the Soup Societies. Heavens! . . .

"A presentiment is on me—I shall at last be worn out and perish, like an old nutmeg-grater, grated to pieces by the constant attrition of the wood, that is,

the nutmeg. What I feel most moved to write, that is banned—it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the *other* way I cannot. So the product is a final hash, and all my books are botches." He admits that he feels cheerfully disposed and therefore (odd perversity!) writes a little bluely, and he proceeds to picture Hawthorne and himself in Paradise, with champagne: "How shall we pleasantly discourse of all the things manifold which now so distress us,—when all the earth shall be but a reminiscence, yea, its final dissolution an antiquity".

All fame is patronage, he continues, in the same long excited letter of an overwrought mind. "Let me be infamous: there is no patronage in *that*. What 'reputation' H. M. has is horrible. Think of it! To go down to posterity is bad enough, any way; but to go down as a 'man who lived among the cannibals'!" Fame he regards as the most transparent of vanities. He reads Solomon more and more, and sees deep and unspeakable meanings in him; yet even Solomon has "managed" the truth with a view to popular conservatism. His reminiscence becomes more precise when he writes: "I am like one of those seeds taken out of the Egyptian Pyramids, which, after being three thousand years a seed and nothing but a seed, being planted in English soil, it developed itself, grew to greenness, and then fell to mould. So I. Until I was twenty-five, I had no development at all. From my twenty-fifth year [that is, after his return from sea in 1844] I date my life. Three weeks have scarcely passed, at any time between then and now, that I have not unfolded within myself. But I feel that I am now come to the inmost leaf of the bulb, and that shortly

the flower must fall to the mould." He was, in fact, completing his "inmost leaf"—*Moby-Dick*.

Part of the perversity which breaks mockingly through this long letter was due to the circumstances of his life and calling. "What's the use of elaborating what, in its very essence, is so short-lived as a modern book? Though I wrote the Gospels in this century, I should die in the gutter." What he would have been in affluence and security, with power to order his life as he liked, it is impossible to decide; but it is clear that circumstances pressed him sorely at times, if only by recalling him from his ideal to this unideal world. In 1855 he published a whimsical sardonic essay, *The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids*, and Mr. Weaver points to the first part of the paper as a recollection of an enchanting evening at the Temple, during the visit to England, and to the second as the antithesis of this; saying that Melville's household now comprised three of his sisters, his mother, his wife, and three of his own children. Whether such a woman'd household proved an intolerable vexation to him it is difficult to say, and we are not called upon to imagine, except in relation to the probable causes of Melville's pessimism; and this we may attribute to the reaction of the mind against the task of incessant composition.

These intimacies were for Hawthorne alone; with others a lighter and happier look is maintained. Thus Mrs. Hawthorne speaks of Melville coming in one evening and telling of a fight he had seen on a Pacific island and of the prodigious blows given by one of the savages who wielded a heavy club; so extremely graphic was the relation that when he had gone and

the Hawthornes talked over the visit, they asked, Where is the club? and looked round for it without finding. When, later, they asked Melville about it, they gathered it was still in the Pacific island, if anywhere. He was a famous narrator of stories, fond of children—Julian Hawthorne as a small child loved him—and was apparently happy in the normal relations of life. It was the exhaustion of authorship, and the mysteries of the world metaphysically considered, that made his heart gloomy and uneasy.

It is to Mrs. Hawthorne that we owe a vivid description of Melville, a description all the more striking because of her reverence for her husband. "I am not quite sure that I do not think him a very great man. . . . A man with a true, warm heart, and a soul and an intellect—with life to his finger-tips; earnest, sincere and reverent; very tender and modest. He has very keen perceptive power; but what astonishes me is, that his eyes are not large and deep. He seems to me to see everything accurately; and how he can do so with his small eyes, I cannot tell. They are not keen eyes, either, but quite undistinguished in any way. His nose is straight and rather handsome, his mouth expressive of sensibility and emotion. He is tall and erect, with an air free, brave and manly. When conversing, he is full of gesture and force, and loses himself in his subject. There is no grace or polish. Once in a while his animation gives place to a singularly quiet expression, out of these eyes to which I have objected; an indrawn, dim look, but which at the same time makes you feel that he is at that moment taking deepest note of what is before him. It is a strange, lazy glance, but with a power in it quite

unique. It does not seem to penetrate through you, but to take you into itself."

Melville's reserve, in fact, wore anonymity as a mask. An unremarkable man, escaping praise by disdain or indifference, he passed among normal men as one of themselves, as he passed among men of genius as a normal man—unrecognized. He repaid indifference with indifference; almost the only one of his contemporaries that he praised was the one he came to know in the flesh. He wrote of *The Scarlet Letter* and its predecessors with a lyrical ardency and confidence before he had met Hawthorne; afterwards he wrote as eagerly of *The House with the Seven Gables*. Hawthorne finished it in 1851, a few months after his friendship with Melville began, and the latter praised its richness and tragedy, trying to solve what he termed the Hawthorne problem. He finds something definite in Hawthorne's melancholy negations, for the grand truth about him is that he says No! in thunder, and the devil himself cannot make Hawthorne say Yes. All men, he concludes, who say Yes, lie.

How Hawthorne received this is not recorded, nor how he wrote to Melville concerning *Moby-Dick;* whatever he said was sufficient—and a little from Hawthorne was sufficient—to provoke a gorgeous rhapsody. "Your appreciation," he cried, "is my glorious gratuity. . . . A sense of unspeakable security is in me at this moment, on account of your having understood the book." He gushed with thanks, as a sudden mountain spring gushes into the lower hollows; he feels, he says, ineffable socialities, an infinite fraternity of feeling. To Hawthorne only of his friends did he thus freely and unrestrainedly loosen his mountain

torrent of affection, pride and gratitude. A letter to Evert Duyckinck, written not long before this friendship with Hawthorne began, shows something of admiration for Emerson, but it is mitigated by sardonic reflections. "I was very agreeably disappointed in Mr. Emerson. I had heard of him as full of transcendentalism, myths and oracular gibberish. . . . To my surprise, I found him quite intelligible, tho' to say truth, they told me that that night he was unusually plain. . . . I could readily see in Emerson, notwithstanding his merit, a gaping flaw. It was the insinuation that had he lived in those days when the world was made, he might have offered some valuable suggestions. These men are all cracked right across the brow."

But his references to contemporaries are few, and even his happy, if not quite equal, intimacy with the author of *The Scarlet Letter* was brief. Hawthorne left Lenox in the winter of 1851, and in 1853 was appointed American Consul at Liverpool.

CHAPTER IV

THE LONG SECLUSION—DEATH OF MELVILLE

Moby-Dick or The Whale was published on 18th October 1851, the English edition preceding the American. Upon a book at which he had laboured with such tribulation of spirit and body, and which the difficult, coy Hawthorne himself had praised, Melville placed considerable hopes; and his necessities prompted him in this, for a few months earlier he had failed to obtain a further advance on royalties, partly because his account was already overdrawn. *Moby-Dick* has come to be acknowledged as his greatest book, one of the noblest of imaginative prose writings, and of recent years it has been reprinted in various popular series of "classics". Its immediate success was, nevertheless, infinitely below its merits, and although it did not slip into oblivion, its public was soon reduced to a remnant. Mr. Weaver is able to refer to a royalty account for ten months in 1863-64, comprising seven books and total sales of three hundred copies.

How great was his discouragement at this time is clearly seen in *Pierre*, published about a year after *Moby-Dick*. It is a book of raptures and glooms, in

which all the artillery of circumstance is turned against the innocence and foolishness of youth, to sink it into the mud. Dostoieffsky never wrote a more desperate book, nor the author of *Jude the Obscure* a more depressing. It is written out of an exhausted imagination and an inflamed nervous system. His eyesight had troubled him, and Mrs. Melville said that they all felt anxious about the strain on Herman's health in the spring following the issue of *Pierre*; and this must have been due partly to an inevitable reaction from the inhuman tension of composition, and partly to the abuse which *Pierre* provoked. The strain on his physical health was cause and effect of the strain on his spiritual health, as shown in his apprehension of the world. His judgement of his readers failed, or he saw and defied it with a fierce surge of the perversity that heaved within him. No book was less likely to conciliate readers than *Pierre*, and he found that the vast idealism of one part and the abhorrent realism of the other, and the distressing gulf between the two, revolted them all. In a later chapter we shall be looking at *Pierre* more closely, but it must be said here that this novel is one of the most powerful of all the books neglected by readers avid of an easier delight than Melville offers. *Pierre* is the spiritual counterpart of *Moby-Dick*, and like that written from within, with desperate pulse and bitter returns of hope and defeat.

If it revolted his readers, however, they had still to be humoured, for Melville's responsibilities weighed heavily. About two years after *Pierre* came *Israel Potter*, a delightful picaresque story, half of it strictly historical. True that the delight is not unshadowed;

poor Israel is as surely a victim of remorseless fate as Pierre Glendinning, and the London of his long exile is as gloomy as the London of "The City of Dreadful Night". But Israel's sufferings are of the body more than the spirit. Melville had uttered his impeachment of the unknown, the unknown within and without, in *Pierre*, and then subdued his question; he turned to *Israel Potter*, and in the busy externality of episode and character he was able to put aside the gaunt, hungry face of infinity.

In the years between *Moby-Dick* (1851) and *Israel Potter* (1855) Melville sought some occupation which would ease his circumstances. R. H. Dana wrote to Allan Melville concerning a motion to obtain for him an appointment as Consul at the Sandwich Islands, but nothing resulted from this kindly effort. Another letter, from Allan Melville to Herman's father-in-law, refers to the Antwerp consulate: "Should this be tendered, Herman ought to accept it". Hawthorne, too, it seems, had spoken of the same thing; but once again nothing happened, and *Israel Potter* was Melville's own effort to supply the vacancy. There were also other stories which, after appearing in magazines, were published in the volume called *Piazza Tales*, in 1856; and of these "Benito Cereno" is a flaming instance of the author's pure genius. It was originally published in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* in the latter part of 1855, an astonishing story which must have brought tears of pride to Melville when he looked back upon it; and only a little less wonderful is an episode in another of the series, "The Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles". Yet these stories failed to enlarge appreciably the audience which Melville had painfully won, and the

editor of *Putnam's* could still refuse a story because the religious sensibilities of the public would be hurt. Melville, in fact, even when *Moby-Dick* had proved his dominant genius, was still cap-in-hand to editors who understood, and feared, the American public of 1854; nothing was ever printed simply because it was Melville's. "I am very loth to reject the 'Two Temples', as the article contains some exquisitely fine description and some pungent satire, but my editorial experience compels me to be very careful in offending the religious sensibilities of the public, and the moral of the 'Two Temples' would sway against us the whole power of the pulpit". To read the offending story now is to discover that the "moral" is that at home in his own land the author had been thrust out from one Temple, a church; and, a stranger in a strange land, had found sterling charity in another, a theatre, in which Macready played Richelieu. It is not a good story, and might have been refused for that reason; but the moral reason must needs have amused as well as enraged Melville.

One more novel followed, *The Confidence-Man, His Masquerade*, in 1857. With *The Piazza Tales* he had changed his publishers, whether at his own wish or theirs I do not know, but the comparative failure of his earlier stories, and the destruction of whole editions by a fire at Harper's, suggest that there may have been a desire on both sides for a change. In *The Confidence-Man*—ironically named—Melville gave his last considerable hostage to fortune, considerable in bulk, negligible in quality. It was like smoke after flame, and in that smoke, so thick and tedious, Melville withdrew. Yet even that withdrawal was an ineffectual

protest against indifference, for nobody noticed; America's desperate genius vanished, and nobody knew or asked whither. If it was simply the sense of failure that silenced him, there was sadness in the withdrawal; if there was an ironic challenge, there was greater sadness because the challenge lay neglected.

Between the writing and the publication of *The Confidence-Man*, Melville had visited Europe again. His wife said that a little before he had suffered from ill-health, the result of too severe application to his work, and accordingly he sailed for England in October 1856, and returned several months later. Hawthorne being Consul at Liverpool, Melville promptly visited him. Hawthorne records the visit, saying that Melville was on his way to Constantinople. He looked much the same, perhaps a little paler and sadder, and with his characteristic gravity and reserve. Hawthorne felt a little awkward because of the failure to get a consular appointment for his old friend, but soon the awkwardness was dispelled, and the familiar confidence resumed. Melville, he says, had not been well, and his writings for a long while past had indicated morbidity, and he had pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated. Hawthorne thought that the restless spirit would never rest until he had got hold of some definite belief. But though restless, he declared that the spirit of adventure was gone. Showing him round Liverpool and Chester his host observed him closely and found him much overshadowed. "He sailed on Tuesday, leaving a trunk behind him, and taking only a carpet-bag to hold all his travelling-gear. This is the next best thing to going naked; and as he wears his beard and moustache, and so needs no dressing-

case—nothing but a tooth-brush—I do not know a more independent personage. He learned his travelling habits by drifting about, all over the South Seas, with no other clothes or equipage than a red flannel shirt and a pair of duck trousers. Yet we seldom see men of less criticisable manners than he." He had learned to dispense with much that others think indispensable, but he could not discard his own hopes and memories.

Melville's travels are recorded in a very brief journal, written shorthand-wise, and in certain poems. The journal is terse, exclamatory, vivid, but not very readable, if the extracts given by his biographer may be taken as a sample. He was curious and alert, apparently seeing everything eagerly and sharply. The peculiarly sombre aspect under which the world was presented to him is shown even in casual notes: "The horrible grimy tragic air of the Streets (Ruffians of Galatea). The rotten and wicked-looking houses, so gloomy and grimy, seem as if a suicide hung from every rafter within. . . . The women's tombs carved with heads (women no souls)." Such a passage suggests how much of himself he carried to Constantinople. The verse in which he has made a fuller record is found in a short series of descriptions, *Fruit of Travel Long Ago*, mainly of Italy and Greece, and in an immense narrative poem, *Clarel*, devoted to the Holy Land. *Clarel* is often interesting, and sometimes pleasant, in its use of dialogue, but except for occasional vivid pictures of a landscape which, in its barren massiveness, plainly fascinated him, it could have been written almost as well without ever stirring from the door of "Arrowhead". Its real theme and real

interest are philosophic; and when things are seen they are seen as in retrospect, in their effects rather than in their presence. Even the philosophy, even the religion is not pure; Melville's speculations are embarrassed with a sectarianism that reads poorly to us now—a reminiscence, no doubt, of the Puritanic influences from which he never quite emerged.

Clarel was not published until 1876, twenty years after his journey had started, and it was only due to the kindness of his uncle, Peter Gansevoort, that it was issued at all. It did not find a publisher in England. Melville had, in fact, sunk to the depth of the obscure, mute, unpublished throng—dejected authors damned unheard. "If during the period in which this work has remained unpublished, though not undivulged, any of its properties have by a natural process exhaled; it yet retains, I trust, enough of original life to redeem it at least from vapidity. Be that as it may, I here dismiss the book—content beforehand with whatever future awaits it". The indifference is not assumed, the disdain is not dissembled.

When Melville returned from Europe in 1857 with *Clarel*—thus eminently adapted, as he said, for unpopularity—still in his head and unwritten, he cast round again for means to live and was swept into the rage for lecturing, a rage which even in the third decade of the twentieth century has not subsided in America. Between 1857 and 1860 he lectured in various prosperous towns for unvaryingly paltry fees—an average during one season and after allowing for expenses, of about thirty dollars a lecture. It was, it seems, to the author of *Typee* and *Omoo* that the audience came to listen, and they listened to the man who had lived with

cannibals lecturing, for example, on statuary in Rome. Quite truly, no doubt, did the local reporter judge when he said that the lecture interested those of artistic tastes, but the larger part of the audience would have preferred something more modern and personal. Another lecture, on the South Seas, seems to have given a more general pleasure, but it is not difficult to believe the report of his friend who said that Melville did not take kindly to lecturing.

The lectures, however, and the assiduous kindness of his father-in-law, Lemuel Shaw, assisted him to live during these three years, but in 1861 he made another effort to obtain a consular appointment, journeying to Washington for this purpose and meeting Lincoln. Again he was unsuccessful, and in 1863 left Pittsfield, the home of early memories as well as later painful ones, for New York. Not until the end of 1866 did he receive the post of Inspector of Customs, which he retained for nineteen years. R. H. Stoddard recognized in the new Inspector a famous writer whom he had met a quarter of a century before. "No American writer was more widely known in the late forties and early fifties in his own country and in England than Melville. . . . Whether any of Melville's readers understood the real drift of his mind, or whether he understood it himself, has often puzzled me. Next to Emerson he was the American mystic. He was more than that, however, he was one of our great unrecognized poets, as he manifested in his version of 'Sheridan's Ride', which begins, as all students of our serious war poetry ought to know: 'Shoe the steed with silver that bore him to the fray.' Melville's official duty during the last years of my Custom-

House life confined him to the foot of Gansevoort Street, North River, and on a report that he might be changed to some district on the East River, he asked me to prevent the change, and Benedict said to me, 'He shan't be moved', and he was not; and years later, on a second report of the same nature reaching him, I saw Benedict again, who declared with a profane expletive, 'He shall stay there' ".

Between his meeting Lincoln in 1861 and receiving his Government appointment in 1866 the American civil war had flamed and spread and died, but of Melville's concern in it nothing is written beyond *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War.* His surviving daughter is not aware that he ever served with the North; "I would not have known it at the time if he had, but knowing his personality, I feel very sure that he took no part in public matters, but confined his ideas on such subjects to the household . . . in his own fashion. It is possible he talked with others, when the spirit moved him, but if he did I was too young to know or understand anything about it." Even his indefatigable American biographer is unable to add a syllable to what his subject has written. These war-poems, he says, originated in an impulse imparted by the fall of Richmond, though an earlier prompting is to be noted: "I seem, in most of these verses, to have but placed a harp in a window, and noted the contrasted airs which wayward winds have played upon the strings". The most reserved of men was the most sensitive, and the great national hopes and anguish, warring desires and opposing resolutions, touched him inwardly. A prose supplement to the war-poems is dictated by "patriotism not free from solicitude",

and a conviction of the infinite desirableness of re-establishment. With the wisdom of a generous heart and the generosity of the wise, he pleads for consideration of the other side, the South. Patriotism, he urges, is not baseness or inhumanity; and for himself he seeks to ease the burden of victory by imagining the positions reversed, the victor vanquished. An eloquent melancholy sighs through his words, spoken from a heart which has known and lost many illusions and feels that only charity and forbearance are clear of illusion.

Battle-Pieces was a kind of final public utterance, for *Clarel* was so inconspicuous for all its size that it can hardly be said to have been "published" at all. Melville was to live another twenty-five years and in the last few months of his life was to write a marvellous prose lyric or lyrical narrative, *Billy Budd*. It was not published until long after his death, with other neglected prose pieces; but except for these the long slow twenty-five years were to be spent in obdurate silence, the heart beating in a crystal-cold chamber.

Little is related of this last period. Philosophy attracted him, and perhaps overwhelmed him. "This hellish society of men" was underlined in his copy of Schopenhauer, and also another phrase: "When two or three are gathered together, the devil is among them". But no great importance can be attached to random phrases such as these, when they are not supported by something more unquestionable, and it is rational to hold that Melville is not to be judged by such casual phrases of others. Once a student named Titus Munson Coan boldly called on "the renowned author of *Typee*, etc.". But the renowned author

would not repeat his experiences; "I sought to hear of Typee and those Paradise Islands, but he preferred to pour forth his philosophy and his theories of life. The shade of Aristotle arose like a cold mist between myself and Fayaway." Melville was transformed from a Marquesan to a gipsy student, and the gipsy remained strong; his visitor found that the people of Pittsfield considered him little better than a cannibal himself, and his attitude seemed something like that of an Ishmael. "When I left him he was in full tide of discourse on all things sacred and profane. But he seems to put away the objective side of life and to shut himself up in this cold North as a cloistered thinker."

He remained a cloistered thinker, but I cannot believe that he was cloistered because of petulance; neither niggard vices nor niggard virtues were his. He had withdrawn because he had failed and because he had been driven to accept the world's terms. In his own secret proud way he had challenged the world with his genius, and the world had defeated him by ignoring the challenge and starving him. His friend, Arthur Stedman, says that had Melville cared to join freely in the literary movements of New York his name would have been prominent and his books would have sold well; but as he grew older his retirement became more and more rigid, and when he died a significant phrase crept into an obituary notice, namely, that although eloquent in talking of general literature he was dumb when his own writings were mentioned. Virtue, in fact, a special and blessed human virtue, had gone out of him, and he lived in spiritual isolation and soundlessness; at the faintest tapping on the shell of

his private life, he became fixed, incommunicative, mask-like. It was only too easy for him to live alone, for he was not in the homely phrase a good mixer, in spite of his years as a common seaman. It seemed an inconsistency, he said, to assert unconditional democracy in all things, and yet confess a dislike to all mankind in the mass; but certainly he had, if not a visible dislike, a reluctance to mingle with men. His devotion was reserved for the individual man, his democracy being purely abstract and political; and in his isolation he hugged to himself a dream of heroic aristocracy, an aristocracy not of birth, since it embraced Jack Chase, but of genius and personality.

Assuredly it was not the isolation of sterility, for, as I have just said, in a few months at the end of his life he was able to write *Billy Budd* which, for effortless loftiness of imagination, is equal to *Moby-Dick* itself. More certainly still it was not the isolation of the insane, as has been suggested, for the insane do not quietly pursue an employment such as Melville pursued, and preserve the spiritual faculties as he preserved them. It was rather the isolation of renunciation, in which all his colloquies were with his own thoughts and the remembrance of things past. Externally he was the normal man: a note by his grand-daughter recalls him as walking with her in Central Park, a brave and striking figure, bright and playful, yet commanding a certain awe as of some one who knew remote and strange things. His impressiveness came by nature, not by study. He had puzzled Hawthorne in 1856, in England, and Hawthorne concluded that faith was wanting; he could not believe, nor be comfortable in unbelief—he was too honest

and courageous. Had he been religious, it seemed, he would have been truly religious and reverential, for he had a very high and noble nature. Julian Hawthorne adds to our small knowledge of Melville's impression on others when he writes: "There was vivid genius in this man, and he was the strangest being that ever came into our circle. Through all his wild and reckless adventures, of which a small part only got into his fascinating books, he had been unable to rid himself of a Puritan conscience; he afterwards tried to loosen its grip by studying German metaphysics, but in vain. He was restless and disposed to dark hours, and there is reason to suspect that there was in him a vein of insanity. His later writings were incomprehensible. . . . When I was in New York, in 1884, I met him, looking pale, sombre, nervous, but little touched by age. He died a few years later. He conceived the highest admiration for my father's genius, and a deep affection for him personally; but he told me, during our talk, that he was convinced that there was some secret in my father's life which had never been revealed, and which accounted for the gloomy passages in his books. It was characteristic in him to imagine so; there were many secrets untold in his own career. But there were few honester or more lovable men than Herman Melville." It is, I suppose, natural to think a man mad if you cannot understand what he says, but I shall be able to show that his later writings are far from incomprehensible. Julian Hawthorne, nevertheless, is acute in detecting a consciousness of suppression in Melville, and in noting that he imputed it to others; for in 1884 and long before he was suppressing and re-

nouncing his own genius. It could not have been a bloodless renunciation, for he yearned to speak and all his adult life was a struggle between invincible reserve and eager expressiveness. In one of his letters to Hawthorne he wrote: "Let us speak, though we show all our faults and weaknesses—for it is a sign of strength to be weak, to know it, and out with it; not in a set way and ostentatiously, though, but incidentally and without premeditation".

His poem *L'Envoi* (*The Return of the Sire de Nesle*) is stated to have been written to his wife. It was the last of the poems printed in his lifetime, and the tenderness of its tribute is significant.

> My towers at last! These rovings end,
> Their thirst is slaked in larger dearth:
> The yearning infinite recoils,
> For terrible is earth.
>
> Kaf thrusts his snouted crags through fog:
> Araxes swells beyond his span,
> And knowledge poured by pilgrimage
> Overflows the banks of man.
>
> But thou, my stay, thy lasting love
> One lonely good, let this but be!
> Weary to view the wide world's swarm,
> But blest to fold but thee.

The one lonely good remained his until his death in New York on Monday, the 28th September 1891, at the age of seventy-two. Intellectual seclusion had not wrought an inhuman coldness; the companionship of more than forty years was, in his own phrase, blest. The part that time had in him was buried in earth, not in the sea of his experience and imagination;

the part that the human spirit had in him survived, and if it still presents questions which cannot be clearly answered, it is because the heart of man is deep, and the darkness of genius unfathomable.

His two sons had died young, and only his wife and two daughters survived him. One of the daughters is still living.

CHAPTER V

TYPEE, OMOO, REDBURN, AND *WHITE JACKET*

It has already been stated that *Typee*, as it has sometimes been reprinted, and as it has been mainly known in England at least, is an emasculated work. Shearing away certain passages at the whim of ignorant and timid publishers, Melville himself, or some shameless unknown, has wrought a mischief on the first of his novels.

When *Typee* was published, in 1846, as a "peep" at Polynesian life in the Marquesas, the Pacific islands had not been dragged into popularity. For many, the Pacific is a small sea washing Samoa, and Samoa but the tomb of that later romantic writer, Robert Louis Stevenson; and if Melville is regarded at all he is regarded as Stevenson's precursor, whose food was locusts and wild honey and whose obscurer art was but a preparation for Stevenson's lively and lucid description. But Melville was not concerned to make the Pacific illustrious; he was concerned to tell a plain story of his own exciting sojourn on an island of cannibals. The modern picturesque writer and painter had not discovered himself and his opportunity; half a century was to elapse before the sophisticated sought

out these mild and primitive peoples, made holiday in places a little lonelier than the Italian hills, endured pleasant hardships and revived jaded appetites.

It was in the summer of 1842 that Herman Melville and Richard Tobias Greene fled from the "Acushnet" and sought refuge in the Marquesas. The personal adventures already glanced at as forming part of the novelist's autobiography here form part of a prolonged, coherent story, so brightly and so simply told that *Typee* has become a minor classic among those who ask not whether a book be fact or fiction, or both, so long as it is enthralling. But it was not written, nor read, quite so simply, for the many passages suppressed in later editions had aroused doubt, then contention, and then denunciation when they appeared in the first.

The full title, including the brief sequel that shortly followed, was *Typee, a Peep at Polynesian Life during a Four Months' Residence in a Valley of the Marquesas, with Notices of the French Occupation of Tahiti and the Provisional Cession of the Sandwich Islands to Lord Paulet, and a sequel, the Story of Toby.* It was dedicated to Lemuel Shaw, whose daughter Melville was to marry. The author apologises in the preface for what might seem unwarrantable digressions, but since these digressions were afterwards suppressed, since they reveal so much of the author's native attitude towards the movement of his time, and since the movement of his time set so strongly against him because of these digressions, we cannot treat them as other than important parts of his story.

Melville was only twenty-six when *Typee* was published, and few could guess that his steadfast

impeachment of the civilizers and Christianizers was the utterance of an inexperienced young man and unpractised writer; but, indeed, what makes his impeachment a significant one was not simply that it was based upon what he had seen for himself, with eyes the clearest of all that shared his sight, but also that it betrayed as already fixed and positive a critical attitude that was to subsist throughout his life.

All these significant passages were excised. When Melville says that the Protestant missions seemed to have despaired of reclaiming the Marquesas from heathenism; when he contrasts the furtive and infrequent vice of cannibalism with the public and legal mutilation of the bodies of English criminals only a few years earlier; when he speaks of that disease with which the whites had defiled the Sandwich Islanders; when, revolted by what he has seen, he declares it would be better for the Typees to remain happy and innocent heathens, than to be named Christians and made the victims of civilized vices and evils; when he discovers in these shameless Marquesans a universal perception of what is just and noble; when he says these and a hundred other such things, this later Rousseau is condemned and his story expurgated. R. H. Dana, in *Two Years Before the Mast*, had already deplored the defiling touch of civilization, but when Melville outpoured his indignation it was felt that the time had come to stifle the charge and smother the evidence.

His quarrel is twofold—first with civilization and second with missionaries. Civilization does not engross all the virtues of humanity, he says; for he could not but question the truth of popular reports concerning

the depravity of the islanders. He declares that after a few weeks in the Marquesas he formed a higher estimate of human nature than he had held before; "but alas! since then I have been one of a crew of a man-of-war, and the pent-up wickedness of five hundred men has nearly overturned all my previous theories". Again and again he deplores the corruption of ignorant natives by dissolute aliens, and cannot conceal his contempt for those who first ruin those they despoil; and several pages are devoted to the malpractices of the French during the year of his own sojourn with the Typees. He looks at the Marquesans, and challenges the alien morals and manners that steal into the midst of them like a fever; and turning his eyes abroad, he says the fiend-like skill of our wars is enough to distinguish the civilized white as the most ferocious animal on the face of the earth.

Had Melville stayed here, his words might have awakened sympathy, for Christian missionaries could have claimed his witness to the need for their labours; but, instead, he turned a yet sharper tongue against them. There is, happily, no anticipation of the false praises of paganism which certain English and French writers of later years have indulged in, as though it were an intoxicating but unpoisonous liquor; Melville has not the least touch of a sensuous morbidity. He speaks of the *frightful* genius of pagan worship. But he says such things of the missionaries, and of the tyranny of social and religious systems artificially imposed upon ignorance, as leave no room for mistaking his true opinions. In the abstract, he admits, the cause of Christian missions is a just and holy cause; but he has no confidence in the sanctity of the apostles

of the South Seas, and he anticipates an objection to his own statements as being malevolent and irreligious.

His anticipation, as I have remarked, was realized. Whatever might provoke the traders, the navies or the missions was blotted out, the most vigorous limbs were lopped, and Melville's first book handed down in this wan and suave guise in popular reprints to the present day.

Yet even so the book has an attractiveness, though not all that Melville meant. The pictures of island life, the bright innocence of nimble Fayaway, the good-humour of the narrative when anger is not breaking through, the succession of figures and scenes in film-like clearness and rapidity; these suffice to make *Typee* romantically pleasant. Romantic was a term somewhat artfully employed by a writer in the *Athenæum*, who could not decide whether it was true history or pleasant romance. The addition of the "sequel", relating the adventures of Richard Greene after his separation from Melville, gave this writer another opportunity for scepticism; but truth or fable, *Typee* was welcomed. It is simply and competently written, without the later richness, and without the later beauty of rhythm; but here and there the fuller style is touched:—"As I gazed upon this monument, doubtless the work of an extinct and forgotten race, thus buried in the green nook of an island at the ends of the earth, the existence of which was yesterday unknown, a stronger feeling of awe came over me than if I had stood musing at the mighty base of the Pyramid of Cheops. There are no inscriptions, no sculpture, no clue, by which to conjecture its history; nothing but the dumb stones. How many

generations of those majestic trees which overshadowed them have grown and flourished and decayed since first they were erected!"

Elsewhere is a whimsical passage that might have come out of *Mardi*. "There were none of those thousand sources of irritation that the ingenuity of civilized man has created to mar his own felicity. There were no foreclosures of mortgages, no protested notes, no bills payable, no debts of honour in Typee——" and so on through an amusing paragraph. But it is neither for his style nor for his love that Melville's first book will be read now, as it has always been read, but for the excellence of the narrative and the vividness of the scene. Generations of travellers have come and gone since *Typee* was published, and the pen has given place to the lens; but those who prefer the personal voice to the impersonal dancing film will still read *Typee*, partly for itself and partly because it is the first book of the author of *Moby-Dick*.

It has been read for another reason by Sir J. G. Frazer, whose references to *Typee* in *The Belief in Immortality and the Worship of the Dead* (1913) are frequent, and who has adopted for scientific illustration some of Melville's finest prose passages. The same scholar's earlier and vast *Golden Bough*, among its numerous items of native belief and practice in Polynesia, makes no use of Melville's work, although *Typee* teems with instances of the mysterious caprices of "taboo"; and indeed even in his later book Sir J. G. Frazer is doubtful of the value of Melville's evidence, although using it rather freely. "His personal observations are valuable, but as he did not

master the native language he was not able to throw much light on the inner life of the people, and in particular on their religious ideas." It is not surprising if a romantic writer offers a somewhat teasing witness on the questions discussed by a scientific writer, and Melville himself confesses an almost entire inability to gratify any curiosity that may be felt with regard to the theology of the islanders. "I saw everything but could comprehend nothing."

Omoo succeeded it in 1847. The preface avowed a purpose similar to that of *Typee*—"to give a *familiar* account of the present condition of the converted Polynesians, as affected by their promiscuous intercourse with foreigners, and the teachings of the missionaries, combined". He asserts a strict adherence to facts concerning missionaries, but kept no journal of his observations; it was the frequency of verbal relation that stamped the facts on his memory before he began to write.

Perhaps the most permanent and certainly the immediate interest of *Omoo* is the autobiographical, which need not be pursued again in this chapter. The practice of authorship has proved an advantage, in providing an interest somewhat lacking in Melville's first book—the interest of characterization. It has been said that his work is deficient in characterization, and that therefore his stories are relative failures, but the deficiency is in the number of characters, not in their drawing. In *Omoo* he presents Jermin, the mate, Long Ghost, the doctor, and others of his sphere with singular clarity and fullness, and in this matter *Omoo* is but a preparation for the greater aims and greater art of the characters of *Moby-Dick*. Of the doctor

he writes with a fondness that recurs throughout the book:

"His personal appearance was remarkable. He was over six feet high—a tower of bones, with a complexion absolutely colourless, fair hair, and a light, unscrupulous grey eye, twinkling occasionally with the very devil of mischief. Among the crew, he went by the name of the Long Doctor, or more frequently still, Doctor Long Ghost. And from whatever high estate Doctor Long Ghost might have fallen, he had certainly at some time or other spent money, drunk Burgundy, and associated with gentlemen. As for his learning, he quoted Virgil, and talked of Hobbes of Malmesbury, besides repeating poetry by the canto, especially 'Hudibras'. He was, moreover, a man who had seen the world. In the easiest way imaginable, he could refer to an amour he had in Palermo, his lion-hunting before breakfast among the Caffres, and the quality of the coffee to be drunk in Muscat; and about these places, and a hundred others, he had more anecdotes than I can tell of. Then such mellow old songs as he sang, in a voice so round and racy, the real juice of sound. How such notes came forth from his lank body was a constant marvel." And of Jermin he writes with equal vividness, partly out of an unconfessed admiration for the rapid and energetic man of action.

Omoo, the word signifying a rover, shifts the scene from the Typee valley to Tahiti and its dependent island, Imeeo. So far as it is a relation of personal adventure and things seen, it is wholly admirable, and won the praise of Stevenson at a time when few praised Melville; for Melville, he declares, touched the South

Seas with genius. At his christening, as it seemed to his ingenious successor, some influential fairy must have been neglected. "'He shall be able to see', 'He shall be able to tell', 'He shall be able to charm', said the friendly godmothers; 'But he shall not be able to *hear*', exclaimed the last." Stevenson is humorously deploring Melville's rendering of the Marquesan speech, a matter in which Dr. T. M. Coan had given help long before. But Stevenson affords a far more interesting and valuable comment on Melville's work, although without any direct reference to his statements concerning the social and spiritual desolation of the islanders. Darwin had visited Tahiti at the end of 1835, during the famous voyage of the "Beagle," and stayed there ten days, being anxious to form a personal judgement of the islanders' moral state. He discovered no fear of the missionaries and no discontent, and he concluded that the morality and religion of the Tahitians were highly creditable. An unwonted asperity comes into his voice when he vindicates them against the grosser charges of travellers, and he retorts upon these detractors somewhat too bluntly and easily.

Melville visited the islands only a few years after Darwin, without any profound acquaintance with the work of earlier travellers, and he promptly ranged himself with those that denounced the traffic of civilization and religion among the hapless natives. He is severe in *Typee,* but far more severe in *Omoo,* for he abhors what he sees and hears, and the effects of what has gone before. He attributes the native depopulation to malignant evils which are solely of foreign origin, and he sternly avers that although the

Tahitians are, on the whole, in better circumstances as the result of missionary labours, the benefits of the latter are utterly insignificant when confronted with the vast preponderance of evil brought about by other means. European contact, with degrading vices subtly stealing into heathen minds and bodies, will extinguish the race:

> The palm-tree shall grow,
> The coral shall spread,
> But man shall cease.

Melville brings abundant witness to the reality of the ills he denounces, and utters his indignation like an outraged spirit compassed with incomprehensible wrongs. Everywhere his cry is the same, and the accents of Ishmael are heard in his voice as he agitates the conscience of his readers.

Forty years later Stevenson followed Darwin and the author of *Omoo* to Tahiti, faced the same problem, and took arms, not with Darwin but with Melville. Like Melville, Stevenson was enchanted with the prospect of the Marquesas as they approached in loveliness, and shocked, when he landed, at the spectacle of physical beauties yielding to moral desolation. The islanders are handsome and comely animals, but doomed by the touch of the white death; the Marquesan, he declares, beholds with dismay the approaching extinction of his race. The missionary obtains an easy authority, and the mild uncomplaining natives yawn and await death. From the vindicator of Father Damien no such charges as Melville makes against the fierce evangelists may be expected, yet even Stevenson's amiability cannot disguise his criticism of missionaries; and apart from missionaries, he speaks with a plainness

that freely confirms Melville's in deploring the fever of civilization and its unresisted advances.

But Melville had long to wait for this support, for Stevenson did not write his voyages until a little before the obscure death of the old man eloquent. When *Omoo* was published long passages were lifted by a reviewer in the *Athenæum,* who dismissed the book after sacking it with the remark that the author seemed to have the power of prolonging his adventures to any extent that might be desired by the public. The praise that was bestowed on the book was bestowed on its Crusoe element; the rest could be ignored or denied. But praise has outlasted objection; *Typee* and *Omoo* form a minor Odyssey, and are read, not coldly for information, but warmly for delight.

Redburn and *White Jacket* followed this Odyssey, the former importing into the Melville canon something that was not there before. He is dealing with his early youth, and he is still but a young man—only old enough to stand aside a little and look back curiously and even affectionately at the ingenuous forlorn lad who stared with all the world before him, and not a single clue to whatever perplexed him. The troubles of *Redburn* are material troubles, for the spiritual has scarce been born; as yet, hunger and cold are much more vital enemies than fatalism, and mysteries are still unconfronted. The peculiar radiance of *Redburn* comes from its innocence: it is a chapter of innocent autobiography, and the light that shines from within it, as from under water, is very pure and clear. The as yet unvexed puritanism that lay beneath Melville's heritage is seen in that verdant light like a softer rock, shaping the current of his thoughts and making them

actual and quick to every man who remembers his own youth—shy and ardent, frank and secret, bold and suppressive. Such is the character that *Redburn* displays.

The simplicity of the boy of seventeen is preserved in the writing of the story by a man who had matured with rare rapidity when he reached thirty. English readers spoke of Defoe when they finished *Typee*, but the reference has a stricter application to *Redburn*. It is not simply that *Redburn* is free from purpose and doctrine, for even *Redburn* is marred by a gross excrescence—the London episode—but that it has the *single eye* of Defoe, the straightness of perfect narrative unembarrassed by foreign interests. And *Redburn* holds the same place among Melville's work as *Captain Singleton* holds among Defoe's; only, the subtlety of Defoe's Quaker is not matched by the roguery of Melville's Captain, for in writing his book Melville was successful in restationing himself at the unsophisticated point of seventeen and discarding the change wrought between the acting of his scene and the making of its record. He is still, or again, the frank, impetuous, illuded youth; for how else could he have retained without compunction that London episode of plushy adventure, so curiously anticipating the manner of *The Picture of Dorian Grey*? And how else could he have followed that awkward unreality by the vivid scenes of the "Highlander" on her return voyage as an emigrant ship? He is still frank, and oddly fails to control his matter or to distinguish the wrong note from the right.

It is a solitary flaw and does not impair seriously the delight of the book. Later writers have achieved

a romantic story of seafaring life, and many an ingenious novelist turned an honest penny by crossing an ocean as though he enjoyed it; and to minister to a taste for vicarious adventure in foreign parts—foreign if five or five thousand miles away—is an office of human kindness. Dana's delightful narrative, *Two Years Before the Mast,* anticipated *Redburn* by some years, but Melville was one of the earliest of those who turned their actual experience to account in the hour of need, and his story was welcomed. True that he was reminded that Marryat had published *Peter Simple,* but it is doubtful whether he had ever heard of Marryat; and it is to be regretted that it has taken the English public so long to discover how much better Melville is than Marryat, and *Redburn* than *Peter Simple.* The genius of the two authors was incomparable, and the attempted comparison was unfair to Marryat. The *Athenæum,* that consistently pursued Melville's steps, keeping a sharp eye on an American interloper, insinuated a doubt of his veracity. "The humour of the book is borrowed from *Peter Simple*—the facts are too simple to suggest the notion of their having been borrowed from any one"—such are the critical manners of 1849. The critic is thankful that the extravagances of *Mardi* are not repeated, and finds that while the book lacks the novelty which made *Typee* and *Omoo* "popular in their day"—significant limitation—it is better written than either; and apart from this one fact emerges, namely, that Melville's fondness for *crescendo,* as the critic terms it, for mysteries and madnesses of many kinds, did not recommend his work to the literary dictators of England. Judgements such as these, indeed, must

needs discourage readers who were at the same time being offered a succession of novels by Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, the Brontës and George Eliot, for if one characteristic can be named as common to most of these it is domesticity. To Victorian domesticity Melville had nothing to say. All that he did say in *Redburn* was, nevertheless, said in a tone and manner of unaffected and pure English, never overphrased or overweighted, never extravagant, and always simple. When the occasion calls he can write with noble and forbearing pathos of the incident already mentioned in our first chapter, the incident of the dying mother. That passage closes and gentles an episode which comes very near to being intolerable, but the ordinary and wholly adequate prose of *Redburn* n its most delightful exercise may be noted in that other passage referred to in Chapter I., concerning the glass ship, or in a brief digression such as this concerning the dismay into which the multitude of nautical phrases had thrust him. "I wonder whether mankind could not get along without all these names, which keep increasing every day, and hour, and moment; till at last the very air will be full of them; and even in a great plain men will be breathing each other's breath, owing to the vast multitude of words they use that consume all the air, just as lamp-burners do gas. But people seem to have a great love for names; for to know a great many names seems to look like knowing a good many things, though I should not be surprised if there were a great many more names than things in the world." Prose of this candid, pleasure-yielding kind is seldom written but by poets, and in our own day but by one poet, Mr. W. H. Davies, who, like

Melville, has endured the memorable hardships of repeated Atlantic crossings as a common member of the crew.

White Jacket followed *Redburn* immediately, and shows the fading of the early lustre into the light of common day. It is offered as a chronicle, yet not a mere journal, of naval life, and what I have called the almost laborious literality of the chronicle is its chief virtue and its chief limitation. Here Melville has become a more sedulous Smollett, and where he permits the lighter hours of an American man-of-war to appear it is still in something of a Smollett manner that he moves, though never allowing the coarseness that Smollett delighted in to touch his pages. A more refined Smollett, a stricter Marryat —to call Melville either of these is to suggest his class but not his personal quality in *White Jacket*. Usually he succeeds in repressing himself, but himself breaks through the repression; for it is characteristic of Melville that the more austerely he sought anonymity the more powerfully did he assert himself. Paradox of his puritanic heritage, that sought and defeated its own purpose continually! The extravagances that betray the repression are often bold and amusing—witness "The great massacre of the Beards", recounting the severity of the bibulous captain who, but a short distance from home, ordered that the flaunted beards of his crew should be sheared off and all chins be carried blue and naked into port for the honour of the service. At first a mutiny seemed imminent: "For some hours the seamen paced to and fro in no very good humour, vowing not to sacrifice a hair. Beforehand, they denounced that

man who should debase himself by compliance. But habituation to discipline is magical; and ere long an old forecastle man was discovered elevated upon a match-tub, while, with a malicious grin, his barber—a fellow who, from his merciless rasping, was called Blue-Skin—seized him by his long beard, and at one fell stroke cut it off and tossed it out of the port-hole behind him. This forecastle man was ever afterward known by a significant title—in the main equivalent to that name of reproach fastened upon that Athenian who, in Alexander's time, previous to which all the Greeks sported beards, first submitted to the deprivation of his own. But, spite of all the contempt hurled on our forecastle man, so prudent an example was soon followed; presently all the barbers were busy.

"Sad sight! at which any one but a barber or a Tartar would have wept! Beards three years old; *goatees* that would have graced a chamois of the Alps; *imperials* that Count D'Orsay would have envied; and *love-curls* and man-of-war ringlets that would have measured, inch for inch, with the longest tresses of the Fair One with the Golden Locks—all went by the board! Captain Claret! how can you rest in your hammock! By this brown beard which now waves from my chin—the illustrious successor to that first, young, vigorous beard I yielded to your tyranny—by this manly beard, I swear it was barbarous!" Melville rises to a high lyricism, not unbefitting this historic Rape of the Lock, when he describes the sacrifice enacted in the shearing of Jack Chase's beard. "So when this barber, who was the only tender-hearted one of his tribe, had kneeled, been absolved, and then blessed, Jack gave up his beard into his hands, and

the barber, clipping it off with a sigh, held it high aloft, and, parodying the style of the boatswain's mates, cried aloud, 'D'ye hear, fore and aft? This is the beard of our matchless Jack Chase, the noble captain of this frigate's main-top!'"

Sadly does Melville descend from this to the story of the one unsubduable rebel, old Ushant, an ancient seaman of flawless character, who endured an inhuman flogging and subsequent imprisonment, rather than part with the grey symbol of his manhood; "that heroic old man", as his helpless champion names him. And sadly, almost with a morbid quiver of his voice, does he speak of other ills of a man-of-war in 1843—ills arising from delegated absolutism, or mere unchecked malevolence, natural ills, and those "absolutely organic to a Navy establishment", and darker ills generated by the unholy congregation of men. "The sea is the true Tophet and bottomless pit of many workers of iniquity"—and by the sea he means that constant, fatal embarrassment of man with men, in the confines of a wooden warship. Here he could be unknown, yet not himself because of the crowd that tainted his breath and exhausted his spirit; not himself, in fact, because he could not be alone; and thus, when from the freedom of the land he looks back to the prison of the sea and recalls whatever has hurt and poisoned him, he cannot recall lightly the events that others too may have felt but happily forgot at the touch of land. The slight morbidity is the effect of his sensibility, driven under for more than a year, and only springing into full life again, like a sea-flower discovered at ebb-tide, when he had escaped.

Mostly the book is brightly external, and dominated

by the smiling features of Jack Chase. Wholly admirable is such a Smollett-like chapter as that of Surgeon Cuticle—even the use of labels for names is traditional—operating upon a hapless sailor who could not outrun the surgeon but must needs be murdered; and grimmer than anything in Smollett or another sea-writer is the chapter, "The Last Stitch", with the horrible, shrunken, unhumanized sail-makers sewing the shroud for a corpse and quarrelling over the last stitch, drawn according to custom through the nose of their dead comrade. Less grim is the chapter that follows, since it ends with this:

"'I am the resurrection and the life!' solemnly began the chaplain, in full canonicals, the prayer-book in his hand.

"'Damn you! off those booms!' roared a boatswain's mate to a crowd of top-men, who had elevated themselves to gain a better view of the scene.

"'We commit this body to the deep!' At the word, Shenly's mess-mates tilted the board, and the dead sailor sank in the sea.

"'Look aloft,' whispered Jack Chase. 'See that bird! it is the spirit of Shenly.'

"Gazing upward, all beheld a snow-white, solitary fowl, which—whence coming no one could tell—had been hovering over the main-mast during the service, and was now sailing far up into the depths of the sky."

On the whole *White Jacket* has been under-rated, yet it is essentially Melville, even to the occasional outbursts of eloquent bravery—here again suppression defeating itself. There is one chapter denouncing war, ending with this melancholy and sonorous phrase:

"Peace to Lord Nelson where he sleeps in his mouldering mast! but rather would I be urned in the trunk of some green tree, and even in death have the vital sap circulating round me, giving of my dead body to the living foliage that shaded my peaceful tomb". His uniquely ingenious mind follows this in the next chapter with another phrase, describing the battle of Navarino in the words of Jack Chase, who fought there. "Showers of burned rice and olives from the exploding foe fell upon us like manna in the wilderness. 'Allah! Allah! Mohammed! Mohammed!' split the air; some cried it out from the Turkish port-holes; others shrieked it forth from the drowning waters, *their top-knots floating on their shaven skulls like black snakes on half-tide rocks.*"

These sudden ascensions are conspicuous because infrequent; mostly the prose is adequate to the plain matter of the story. The brave outbursts, indeed, are welcome after chapters in which propaganda is the aim, as in divers chapters against flogging and rehearsals of various illegalities practised upon seamen. Yet even in an historical chapter entitled "Flogging Not Necessary" the instinct to exalt his theme with Biblical vehemence and lyricism cannot be resisted, for indignation is touching the springs of poetry in him. Nobler passages than the following have been written by few:

"Escaped from the house of bondage, Israel of old did not follow after the ways of the Egyptians. To her was given an express dispensation; to her were given new things under the sun. And we Americans are the peculiar, chosen people—the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world. Seventy

years ago we escaped from thrall; and, besides our first birthright—embracing one continent of earth—God has given to us, for a future inheritance, the broad domains of the political pagans, that shall yet come and lie down under the shade of our ark, without bloody hands being lifted. God has predestinated, mankind expects, great things from our race; and great things we feel in our souls. The rest of the nations must soon be in our rear. We are the pioneers of the world; the advance guard, sent on through the wilderness of untried things, to break a new path in the New World that is ours. In our youth is our strength; in our inexperience, our wisdom. At a period when other nations have but lisped, our deep voice is heard afar. Long enough have we been sceptics with regard to ourselves, and doubted whether, indeed, the political Messiah had come. But he has come in *us*, if we would but give utterance to his promptings. And let us always remember that with ourselves, almost for the first time in the history of earth, national selfishness is unbounded philanthropy; for we cannot do a good to America but we give alms to the world."

Strange to reflect that the author of this uplifted and uplifting plea was speaking to and vindicating a nation which as yet still clung to its slaves, and was to waste a multitude of lives in determining whether slavery was right or wrong. And strange, also, to remember that when *White Jacket* was published in 1850, and praised by some who later could only scoff at *Moby-Dick,* the scope of his genius was misapprehended, and he was looked to as one who might enlarge the library of fictitious adventure—ironical praise for a literal record of things done and endured! Perhaps

it was a subtle praise beyond the intention of the critic, since *White Jacket's* practicality did not obscure from all eyes the deeper, trance-like character of the book; comparison being made with the mood of *The Ancient Mariner*. If Melville knew of this, and of the future held out to him, he must have been not less amused than vexed.

CHAPTER VI

MARDI AND *PIERRE*

It was *Mardi* that drew from the French a phrase which very neatly describes Melville as the author of that romance—an American Rabelais. Any one can show how ludicrous it is to compare Melville's asceticism with Rabelais' indulgence, but any one can see as well how truly Melville's intellectual riotings and spiritual musings match the aboundingness of the French creator. An *American* Rabelais, perhaps, if the name be grudged, but certainly another Rabelais. *Mardi,* however, must be looked at for its own sake and apart from its reminder of that huge and irregular genius; and better still to contrast it with another book of Melville's, equally extravagant but more perplexing—*Pierre.* For *Mardi* records an unending chase, but *Pierre* a chase, a challenge, an encounter ending in disaster.

Mardi preceded *Pierre* by more than three years, but whole centuries are needed to signify the distance between them. In the preface to the former the author says the thought (mentioned in an earlier chapter here) that his fiction might be taken for truth was the germ of others which have resulted in *Mardi*—

an intellectual germ resulting in an intellectual book. From this book all but a "masculine persuasive force" has been expelled. The tenderness of an extreme sensibility, the natural admirations and passions which quicken earlier and later books, are here stilled; Burton and Sir Thomas Browne have shipped with Herman Melville on a whaler, ghostly, sly confederates, whispering brightly or darkly at his ear. At first the voyage is a mere voyage, starting jejunely with, "We are off! The courses and topsails are set". It was the nobly named "Arcturion", an "exceedingly dull" ship, so dull, bound on so dull a voyage, that to endure it is impossible. Taji, as the hero of the romance is named when his lot is cast among the natives of Polynesia, suborns an old Skyeman, Jarl by name, to desert the ship; and a good part of the story is concerned with their desertion, their capture of the "Parki", its loss in a storm, and their subsequent conflict with islanders. Until this point is reached Melville conducts his story with the pleasant ease of *Omoo,* and a touch of inconsequence pleasanter still; something new, in fact, stirs in the narrative, a lightness that comes with the discovery of the two native stowaways on the deserted ship, Samoa and Annatoo.

> Here was the strangest pair
> In the world anywhere—

Never did husband and wife lead more jarring lives by day, or sleep more forgivingly at night. Annatoo's pilferings, so vain and purposeless, Samoa's inability to govern her—"Ah! Annatoo: Woman unendurable: deliver me, ye gods, from being shut up in a ship with such a hornet again". She had offered

herself to Jarl, and Jarl had contemned her; and then, stung by her derision, he had proposed to place her in a sack and commit her body to the deep.

It is Annatoo that brings the lightness, and Annatoo is one of the very few women to be met with in Melville's work. Her violent death in a storm, when "like unto some stricken buffalo brought low to the plain, the brigantine's black hull, shaggy with seaweed, lay panting on its flank in the foam", marks the point of change in *Mardi*. With the sinking of the "Parki" the pleasant narrative becomes a subtle and burdened allegory; but the sinking of the "Parki" is itself the noblest episode in the whole strange book. "*I have loved ships, as I have loved men*", cries Melville in his own voice, watching the brigantine sinking slowly into the placid deep. "To a seaman, a ship is no piece of mechanism merely, but a creature of thoughts and fancies, instinct with life. Standing at the vibrating helm, you feel her beating pulse.

"To abandon the poor 'Parki' was like leaving to its fate something that could feel. It was meet that she should die decently and bravely.

"All this thought the Skyeman. Samoa and I were in the boat, calling upon him to enter quickly, lest the vessel should sink, and carry us down in the eddies; for already she had gone round twice. But cutting adrift the last fragments of her broken shrouds, and putting her decks in order, Jarl buried his axe in the splintered stump of the mainmast, and not till then did he join us.

"We slowly cheered, and sailed away.

"Not ten minutes after, the hull rolled convulsively in the sea; went round once more; lifted its sharp

prow as a man with arms pointed for a dive; gave a long seething plunge; and went down.

"Many of her old planks were twice wrecked; once strewn upon ocean's beach; now dropped into its lowermost vaults, with the bones of drowned ships and drowned men."

It is superfluous to point out with what exactness Melville has anticipated the attitude and the tone of a later writer who, like him, found ships almost more human than men. But here anticipation ends. *Mardi* has been one kind of book up to this point, and now becomes another. The change is complete, unforeseen, unprepared, unimaginable. It is impossible to believe that had Melville meant to write an elaborate and profound allegory of the chase of infinite by infinite, the search of spirit for spirit, the eternal pursuit of Idea, he would have started by devoting nearly forty chapters to a vivid but mainly commonplace account of voyage and calamity. Nothing is won from such a violent contrast. As if to soften it Melville has interposed a few paragraphs in which a wonderful thing is revealed, "the sea on fire".

"Suddenly, as we gazed, there shot high into the air a bushy jet of flashes, accompanied by the unmistakable deep breathing sound of a sperm whale. Soon, the sea all round us spouted in fountains of fire; and vast forms, emitting a glare from their flanks, and ever and anon raising their heads above water, and shaking off the sparkles, showed where an immense shoal of cachalots had risen from below to sport in these phosphorescent billows. The vapour jetted forth was far more radiant than any portion of the sea; ascribable perhaps to the originally luminous fluid

contracting still more brilliancy from its passage through the spouting canal of the whales." The marvel is increased by one solitary whale which must have taken the castaways' small boat for a kindred fish. "Spite of all our efforts he drew nearer and nearer; at length rubbing his fiery flank against the 'Chamois'' gunwale, here and there leaving long strips of the glossy transparent substance which thin as gossamer invests the body of the cachalot."

It is a gorgeous but brief interposition: the whales vanish, islands appear and their natives with a priest, Aaron-like, in the midst of a youthful and comely crew, marked after the style of Tahiti, with a marvellous resemblance to the features of one another. Later, it was ascertained that they were all the children of Aaron and many mothers, and their father was training them for the priesthood. But the real wonder of the islanders' canoe was not the comeliness of the youths, but the hidden loveliness of a maiden who was being carried for offering to strange gods; Yillah, declaring herself more than mortal, with snow-white skin, reared for sacrifice by the dusky savages. By force and guile Yillah is torn from her guardians, the chief priest being slain, and borne into the fleet whaler's boat that outleaps the heavy canoe of the savages; and the wild termless roving begins. And as Taji and Jarl and Samoa bear Yillah unresisting away, so now is Melville borne afar by metaphysical ideas; the plain narrative is cast overboard, sumptuous imaginations are woven for transcendentalism, and a lofty or a melancholy lyricism invades the whole fable.

What caused the change I cannot think: Melville has not said, and so it is easy to invent occasions; but

the inventions can be no more than plausible. It was his nature to keep his reasons to himself. Hypothetical criticism, like hypothetical biography, is dangerous although alluring. It is possible to conceive Melville writing his first forty chapters with growing lack of interest, and suddenly, at a hint of cavil, a single awkward derogation, letting his thoughts drift from the actual to the ideal, from the remembered to the imaginary. The passion for speculation that grew in him could not be fed on the diligent invention of "Parki's" and Jarls and Annatoos, no matter how they might please his readers; with his story hardly more than begun he creates Yillah, and his creation ensnares him; the story is no longer what he meant it to be. The mere desire to escape from the apparent to the unapparent would be a sufficient cause, and following his wandering thoughts through the rest of *Mardi*—a prolonged mental journey—would yield him ease and delight.

It is an infinitely far-wandering journey, slowly progressing into a thinner and vaguer void. Yillah on the little "Chamois" is at first a real and lively being, whom Jarl for a while took for an intruder, an Ammonite syren; but her fairy-like story and her spirit's isolation dispelled all jealousy and fear. When they approach Odo, a royal island, they are well received, chiefly because of the bold announcement: "Men of Mardi, I come from the sun. When this morning it rose and touched the wave, I pushed my shallop from its golden beach, and hither sailed before its level rays. I am Taji." Taji, it seems, was a well-known divinity of Mardi, or demigod, and after but a little demur his reappearance is welcomed by the

chief, Media. Gods were numerous in Mardi, and King Media—himself god and king—was not overwhelmed by the visit of Taji; and the pleasantest chapters of all that Melville wrote on Polynesian life are those in which he fantasticates upon a familiar theme. It is while Taji and Yillah and the others are guests of King Media that three damsels come from Queen Hautia and first employ the flower-symbolism which is to recur again and again until the end of the story; Queen Hautia, it seems, claiming an allegiance which Taji, devoted to Yillah even when she is taken from him, steadfastly refuses.

Something like an earthly paradise is this outlier of the kingdom of Mardi, a paradise ruled over by a South-Seas Haroun-al-Raschid rather than an American Pantagruel; an earthly paradise set in the sunny Pacific, with a wise and humorous ruler dispensing justice by way of satire upon our own poor civilization with its prudence and precautions. Media is both king and parliament, law and lawgiver, sharing Melville's own democratic sympathies and autocratic will. Alas! indeed but an earthly paradise, for the face of the island was pitted with ill; the common sort, round-shouldered Helots, stayed or were kept out of view. When men toil and slay themselves for their masters, the soul screams out; and few of these Helots, adds the chronicler, could choose to be other than the brutes they seemed. On such a hell was this smiling paradise sustained. "Here Death hid his skull; and hid it in the sea, the common sepulchre of Odo. Not dust to dust, but dust to brine; not hearses but canoes. For all who died upon that isle were carried out beyond the outer reef, and there were

buried with their sires' sires. Hence came the thought, that of gusty nights, when round the isles, and high toward heaven, flew the white reef's rack and foam, that then and there, kept chattering watch and ward the myriads that were ocean-tombed."

In this preliminary description of Media's kingdom, his Greek-like Utopia based upon a dark industrialism, sombre though sparely drawn, Melville is preparing his parable of the world—a fair place so long as a man sleeks his lids and soothes his ears when he passes the caves in which unquiet and ill things are confined. And Media is a wise king so long as he avoids uncovering the sickness of his kingdom and muses upon mortality and immortality.

But Mardi comprised more than a single island, and the king himself had not surveyed all his empire; and an occasion for voyaging is found when the mysterious Yillah disappears and Taji is resolved to seek her. Media will accompany Taji and his comrades, and thus a tour with the royal fleet is planned. Three principal members of the royal household accompany the travellers; Mohi or Braid-Beard, teller of stories and keeper of the chronicles; Babbalanja, the mystical philosopher; and Yoomy the minstrel.

Two-thirds of *Mardi* is occupied with this search for Yillah, or rather the search for Yillah is the ultimate purpose, but the immediate engrossing purpose is to travel through the ideas evoked by what is seen and said. Story and sequence are forgot, and Melville speaks ever and anon in his own tongue: Let us hold fast to all we have and stop all leaks in our faith, he cries, as introduction to a story by Samoa. "Do you

believe that you lived three thousand years ago? That you were at the taking of Tyre, were overwhelmed in Gomorrah? No. But for me, I was at the subsiding of the Deluge, and helped swab the ground, and build the first house. With the Israelites, I fainted in the wilderness——" and so on with a prolonged rhetorical flourish. A like brave flourish is heard all through Babbalanja's soliloquy upon death: "Peace, peace, thou liar in me, telling me I am immortal—shall I not be as these bones?" Even more attractive is the prose hymn to the belly and its servants—for that is the real burden of a chapter relating the dinner with twenty-five kings; a gorgeous, many-hued prose, lying perhaps as weightily on the mind as a banquet upon the belly.

Mardi is a wild miscellany of notions—a new *Vulgar Errors*. Like Browne, Melville loves to start fallacies for the purpose of exposing them, or supplanting them with others. Except that there is nothing cynical or sour in these nimble adventures among errors you might almost think that he prefers to find things false and not true; but truth is his idol, as many adventures prove. He seizes the faiths of the world, for Mardi is a continent of the world, and fastens upon the wonderful to utter his wonder.

"'How?' said Media; 'are there those who soothe themselves with the thought of everlasting flames?'

"'One would think so, my lord, since they defend that dogma more resolutely than any other. Sooner will they yield you the isles of Paradise, than it. And in truth, as liege followers of Alma, they would seem but right in clinging to it as they do; for according to

all one hears in Maramma, the great end of the prophet's mission seems to have been the revealing to us Mardians the existence of horrors, most hard to escape. But better we were all annihilated, than that one man should be damned.'" Cheerfulness scarce breaks through this and other passages of the same sad prefiguration—horrors most hard to escape. But the travellers touch another spot in the mental journey without end; needs must men unlearn to learn, for they learn but to unlearn—"we accumulate not, but substitute, and take away more than we add. . . . I will not add, I will diminish; I will train myself down to the standard of what is unchangeably true. Day by day I drop off my redundancies." So the earnest fantastic wit plays upon the problem that none can solve, pondering various answers, accepting none, but never forgetting that the problem is dark and never denying that an answer exists.

And leaving metaphysics, the political systems of two hemispheres are lightly examined—in particular the politics of Dominora and King Bello, afraid to attempt further conquests since so many made too much. The satire is genial and therefore not specially effective, and Melville was the worst equipped writer of his day to deal in secondary and subtle meanings, and ironical reflections upon his kind. He can speak nobly in his satire of his own nation: "Like a young tropic tree she stood, laden down with greenness, myriad blossoms, and the ripened fruit thick-hanging from one bough." He can speak justly of her father-foe—"Rail at him as they might, at bottom all the isles were proud of him"; and critically of Scotland, where devotion becomes grim bigotry; and of Ireland,

"Isle, whose future is in its past, hearthstone from which its children run. . . . Her own hand is her own undoer." And he speaks indignantly of his own nation and the slavery of the South—writing in 1848—asking, Have the slaves souls? and answering: "No, their ancestors may have had; but their souls have been bred out of their descendants." And one of the slaves replies, "Speak not of my Maker to me. Under the lash I believe my masters, and account myself a brute; but in my dreams, bethink myself an angel." The slave-driver, brandishing his thongs, cries that the slaves are content: they shed no tears. Frost never weeps, is the retort, and tears are frozen in frigid eyes. These South savannahs may yet prove battlefields, murmurs Mohi gloomily, as the party drew off; and pondering a remedy for a blot that parches all fertility, words are uttered which might well have been used by Lincoln a dozen years later. Here, indeed, the satirist forgets his assumption and the heart speaks; and a wisdom and humanity that come not with ironic laughter are plainly heard in all that is said.

But there is, for all its transparent melancholy, laughter lurking at the heart of this strange and devious allegory. Philosophy sinks in laughter, tears smile: everything that comes idly into mind is set down, with everything deeply brooded upon: "I run on from one pole to the other; from this thing to that. But so the great world goes round, and in one somerset shows the sun twenty-five thousand miles of a landscape." Laughter, nevertheless, satisfies but a single instinct; a deeper and wider satisfaction is unfolded to the travellers at Serenia, where the pure doctrine of

Alma—divinely surviving in spite of his priests and temples—offers redemption through love. The parable is too plain for comment. But Babbalanja relates a vision that follows the revelation, and Melville's abundant imagination is employed in fashioning this vision, as his own religious heart is opened in the interpretation: "Loved one, love on! But know, that heaven hath no roof. To know all is to be all. Beatitude there is none. And your only Mardian happiness is but exemption from great woes—no more. Great love is sad; and heaven is love. Sadness makes the silence throughout the realms of space; sadness is universal and eternal; but sadness is tranquillity; tranquillity the uttermost that souls may hope for." On such a note does the new Pilgrim's Progress draw toward its end, but the end is not reached until Taji's pursuit of Yillah is more definitely resumed in a kind of contest with her dark rival, Queen Hautia—Lilith of the senses—for a while seducing him from his pursuit, but unable to keep him in her heaven-like hell. For "Eternity is in his eye".

Mardi is a great imagination, a confused parable, a perversely imperfect allegory of eternal and obscure things. It moves from real to imagined, and at times slides briefly and disconcertingly back to the real. It is no more a whole than a pantechnicon is a home, as it crawls from one empty house to another; and the abrupt alternation of high romance and sharpest realism is almost the gravest fault of this unique book. Had Melville seen in beginning it what he would fain be making, and had he subdued his intellect to the task, *Mardi* would not now be numbered with the hapless might-have-beens. He was but a little over

thirty when he wrote it, and although great lyrical poetry has been written by men far younger, few prose masterpieces of a lofty imaginative kind have been written by young men. His tendency to extravagance was unresisted; he could not contain himself, and so all the exaltation and all the wisdom and all the poetry of *Mardi* do not unite in a complete creation. But in an imperfect world there is room for imperfect things, and wisdom in the admiration of them; and *Mardi* may be cherished for what it is instead of deplored because of what it might have been. Few writers are vigorous enough to achieve such failures, and Melville is to be measured by his failure as well as by his achievement. The small perfect thing of one writer may not overshadow the huge and imperfect but vital work of another.

Contemporary English opinion was unsparing: only the first part of the story, the realistic part, was found endurable. Carlyle, Emerson and Fenimore Cooper were dragged in to assist in the denunciation, and it was doubtless a comfort to one critic thus to disrate four eminences at a blow. Melville's metaphysics are taken for bamboozling, and his prose is found puerile. The author commented: "I see that *Mardi* has been cut into by the London *Athenœum,* and also burnt by the common hangman by the *Boston Post.* However, the London *Examiner* and *Literary Gazette* and other papers this side of the water have done differently. These attacks are matters of course, and are essential to the building up of any permanent reputation—if such shall ever prove to be mine. . . . Time, which is the solver of all riddles, will solve *Mardi.*" It remains his sole attempt at allegory,

except in so far as *Moby-Dick* is read allegorically. No one will regret that he did not make another, but only a fool will regret this attempt.

Pierre, the story of a challenge ending in disaster—to justify the label is easy, but it will convey small sense of the significance of the novel that followed *Moby-Dick.* The sub-title is "The Ambiguities", and is essential to an understanding of the book. In an earlier chapter something has been said of the suggestion that in his picture of domestic life, apparently ideal but inwardly unsound, Melville has satirized his own mother; and the speculation need not be revived now. *Pierre* is the story of a brilliant youth of twenty, son of a widowed mother who nurses the proudest memory of his father. Pierre's relation to his mother is of a singular and perhaps not unambiguous kind; they are not mother and son but sister and brother in their daily address and conversation. By chance he meets a beautiful girl who faints on seeing him, and subsequently reveals the overwhelming fact that his father is hers, and her mother a betrayed French refugee. Speak to his own fond, haughty mother he dare not, for her pride and rigid virtue would be affronted and his father's honour besmirched; acknowledge his sister he dare not, for he is betrothed to a lovely Lucy Tartan; deny her he cannot. Strange is the heroic madness of youth; he resolves to announce that he is married already, and married to the foundling Isabel. The announcement unhinges Lucy's mind and transports his intolerant mother, consumed with pride and anger; and thereupon he is driven forth from the ancestral home, penniless, with Isabel his pretended wife and a ruined girl, Delly, for attendant. Sheltering

in a great city, which I suppose is New York, the bewildered and bewildering three live in the strangest of bedlams, while Pierre endeavours to support them by writing novels. He fails, in this as in all else; Lucy Tartan, not understanding his forsaking of her but still faithful to him, arrives in the tenement to make a fourth in the astonishing household; and she is pursued by two opulent youths, one of whom has long loved her and hated Pierre as his cousin, and the other is Lucy's brother. Soon the tragedy is brought to its close: Pierre, maddened to murder, confronts the young men in the street, is struck on the cheek by his cousin and shoots him. In prison Lucy and Isabel at once run to him, and Lucy falls dead at his feet; while Pierre and his sister sink poisoned by the drug the wild girl had carried in her bosom. "Her whole form sloped sideways, and she fell upon Pierre's heart, and her long hair ran over him, and arboured him in ebon vines."

The chief justification of the sub-title, "The Ambiguities", is seen not in Pierre's relation to his mother, a playful one, but in his response to his new-found sister. Her beauty, her strangeness, her remoteness from all but the hungers of affection, play upon him powerfully, and incestuous passions seize him when most he pities her. When he explains that without gratuitous dishonour to his father's memory he cannot be an open brother to her, and whispers untold words of his intention to assume a union which cannot be a real one, "the girl moved not; was done with all her tremblings; leaned closer to him, with an inexpressible strangeness of an intense love, new and inexplicable. Over the face of Pierre there shot

a terrible self-revelation; he imprinted repeated burning kisses upon her; pressed hard her hand; would not let go her sweet and awful passiveness.

"Then they changed; they coiled together, and entangedly stood mute."

More painful, and far from ambiguous, is another passage in which, confessing the disappointment of his hopes as an author, he finds his torments displaced by worse torments, and in burning, extravagant phrase cries out, as Isabel clings to him in the twilight: "If to follow Virtue to her uttermost vista, where common souls never go; if by that I take hold on hell, and the uttermost virtue, after all, prove but a betraying pander to the monstrousest vice,—then close in and crush me, ye stony walls!" And when Pierre sallies forth to the last bloody act he bids Isabel and Lucy farewell in the like frenzy: "For ye two, my most undiluted prayer is now, that from your here unseen and frozen chairs ye may never stir alive; the fool of Truth, the fool of Virtue, the fool of Fate, now quits ye forever!" And yet again, when he seizes the fatal drug he cries to Isabel, for whom his life has been lost, "Wife or sister, saint or fiend", ambiguity clinging still to his words, but disappearing in his action—the fool of Virtue.

The unique quality of *Pierre* is found in its violent disillusion. The brilliant young man, the high-hearted idealist, confronts a difficulty, chooses dishonour for honour's sake, challenges the world and is doubly defeated; first and most deeply by his own masculine passion, secondly by conflict with unrealized circumstances. A worm writhes in the heart of this Galahad. His idealism becomes his undoing, his

relation with Isabel is corrupted, and that which began pure and bright ends in the treachery of the senses. And as for that drear, fore-doomed conflict with the world, there is something at once crass and sad in the silliness of the challenge; and here it is plain enough that the author is speaking not simply for Pierre Glendinning but also for Herman Melville. Pierre is his Hamlet, and Hamlet not alone in his exposure of himself to the world but even in his odd and curt dealing with his mother and her pastor when the fatal secret is out.

Lest fantastic than *Mardi* in its conception, *Pierre* is scarcely less remote from reality, and yet at times it touches the sharpest of realities far more clearly than *Mardi* does. But in *Mardi* there is something sweet, aspiring and undefeated in the pursuit of the inexpressible idea, while in *Pierre* there is an enormous and perverse sadness, declining to mere madness. Melville rose to his greatest when he turned from the allegory of *Mardi* to the symbolism of *Moby-Dick*; he sank into perversity when he conceived *Pierre*. It expresses his own disenchantment in a way that makes him seem like an Apostate of the imagination, turned from his allegiance not for mercenary reasons but for a reason no less deplorable—a lack of faith in himself, in his privilege, in his calling. He is satirizing not his mother, not his friends, but his soul, himself.

There is something of the beauty and the strangeness of shadows in *Pierre*. A strict aesthetic might insist that the beauty of shadows, however rare, cannot surpass the beauty of the shape which is shadowed; another, that even what is void of beauty may cast a shadow which, by the merciful cunning of

a single beam, itself becomes a shape of beauty. Even the gloom of *Pierre,* in the intense light of Melville's genius, is figured with shadows of beauty that rejoice the heart and almost justify the darkness.

Yet, nevertheless, who will not deplore the waste of beauty! There are passages of lovely prose in *Pierre,* leisured, deep-breathed prose; there are tender and gentle episodes—but all wasted. Pierre Glendinning, says Melville, "had not as yet procured for himself that enchanter's wand of the soul, which, but touching the humblest experiences in one's life, straightway it starts up all eyes, in every one of which are endless significancies. Not yet had he dropped his angle into the well of his childhood." He had thrown aside the enchanter's wand when he finished *Redburn,* and now bore a serpent. The psychology is intolerably followed, with the sly and thirsty fury of a stoat; nothing outside the Russians could be more subtle or less scrupulous. "I write precisely as I please," he cries, breaking in on the narrative; and in this scorn of others he has written a book which may move deeply but cannot please any one.

And a principal. reason for this failure is clear. Granting the subject, Melville's aim could only be achieved in verse. The theme is, essentially, one for an Elizabethan play, in which every emotion is exalted and the large movement of blank verse is ready to sustain vast incredibilities. In a verse-drama Melville would have achieved what he needs but cannot achieve —remoteness; his desperate imagination, hanging above and apart from a creeping reality, might have taken on another reality, that of the poetry which is as remote, as real, and as necessary as the sun. But

the faculty was denied to him, and he attempted to do in elaborate prose what he could not do in native verse; and he failed as clearly as Pierre Glendinning failed, and as greatly.

England and America in 1852 were unlikely to be forbearing when a writer who had already vexed the conscience of his time now came forward with a romance of unholy passion. Even in the twentieth century, when all things are lawful, all things are not expedient. Melville flung his retroverted idealism in the face of the public, and the public spokesmen were exasperated. His old enemy, the English press, was strong in denunciation, forgetting that if the book was as bad as it was declared to be, no one need waste time in determining its worthlessness very precisely. An image not quite false and not without humour was used by the *Athenæum*—"it reminds us of a prairie in print, wanting the flowers and freshness of the savannahs, but almost equally puzzling to find a way through it". Second-hand Germanism was the cry, and "we take up novels to be amused"!

To a public so defining its wants Melville now had nothing to offer.

CHAPTER VII

MOBY-DICK AND *BILLY BUDD*

Moby-Dick is a novel, if it can be termed a novel, to consider in isolation. It is lifted above the rest of Melville's work as nobly as the flying sails above the sea.

Melville's characteristic faults, his digressions and his delays, are found in *Moby-Dick,* and are hardly less frequent than in most of his books; but they have little power to retard the reader. Even when he suspends the action, in order to discourse upon the technicalities of whaling, the suspension is not fatal; and though the symbolism is prominent, and readers are impatient of symbolism, it is not capable of marring the drama of Ahab and Moby-Dick, but rather heightens it. Subject and mood are perfectly matched, and since that "matching" is essential to drama, and the form needed here was not verse (as with *Pierre*) but supple, variable prose, he attained a simple and final felicity in the writing of *Moby-Dick.*

The subject calls out something new in him, a humour which most of his writing lacks and forbids. It is a rather sly, inconstant quality, but it is discovered as soon as the young whaler visits the inn frequented

by whaling crews, and finds himself sharing a bed with the apparitional Queequeg, a tattooed savage, once a prince among cannibals, now an emblazoned harpooner with bald purplish skull. More conspicuous is it in the chapter toward the close of the story, when the "Pequod" hails the "Samuel Enderby", and the grimness of Ahab and his wild crew is dreadfully sharpened by contrast with the extravagant good spirits of the stranger. The height of Melville's great argument—which is Ahab's madness in challenging the world for pride—is measured by the simple jolly humour of the English ship, a humour that the author might have borrowed from Marryat if he needed it. But it is not a humorous book, though there is this unfamiliar bright seam in the darkness of the mine. The story that Melville is possessed with is that of the whaler "Pequod", sailing on its last great voyage one Christmas Day under mad, morose Ahab, with Ishmael the chronicler on board, and a crew vividly presented one after another, Starbuck, Stubb and Flask, the harpooners, the sinister Parsee Fedallah and the inspired idiot Pip. They all alike speak with tongues that were never native to mortal men; every man's lips are at times prophetic, full of dark wisdom and pregnant philosophy; and all alike are subdued to their captain's imperious will. In an earlier voyage he had lost a limb in chasing the monstrous, almost mythical White Whale, Moby-Dick; and now, though his pretext is whale-hunting for profit, his real purpose is to destroy his enemy—Ahab and the whale, the prototypes of an eternal bloody strife between opposites. If you ask for a definition of these opposites, the answer is not very easy; they are, in one view, spirit

against flesh, eternity against time; in another view, pride against pride, madness against madness, unreason against unreason. Indeed, the opposition is not an essential one, as Melville presents it; rather than a clashing of opposites there is a contest of rivals. One matches the other, man and whale are alike vindictive and remorseless; the same nature, the same necessity, urges both; the conflict has been set from the foundation of the world. Ever since the first fatal encounter, when he had lost his leg, "Ahab had cherished a wild vindictiveness against the whale, all the more fell for that in his frantic morbidness he at last came to identify with him, not only all his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations. The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung. That intangible malignity which has been from the beginning . . . all the subtle demonisms of life and thought"—it is this and these that haunt Ahab's heart as they haunt Melville; in the author they are subdued to a metaphysical view or half-view of the world, but in his Ahab they are freed and enlarged into domination.

> Of man's first disobedience and the fruit
> Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
> Brought death into the world and all our woe
> With loss of Eden—

this is Melville's theme as it was Milton's, but the name of the great enemy is not Lucifer, but Leviathan. The never-to-be-ended combat typified by Milton's Lucifer and Archangels is typified as boldly by Melville's Moby-Dick and Captain Ahab. Vindicating

his pride against almightiness, Lucifer is overthrown but unsubdued; but vindicating his perverted spirit against a malignity not less perverse, Ahab is slain by the White Whale. The conflict is told in terms of whaling, and told with circumstance and detail that might obscure the greatness of the issue but for the intensity of passion and the exaltation of Ahab's hate: never is the spiritual encounter forgotten in the material. It is a parable of an eternal strife. You may read it as a mere narrative of wonders, you may read it as an allegory of the ancient war between spirit and sense, or between the simple lust of domination and the more primitive lust of strength and freedom; or as Mr. D. H. Lawrence has seen it, you may read it as a parable of another conflict, in which Moby-Dick is "the deepest blood-being of the white race; he is our deepest blood-nature. And he is hunted, hunted, hunted by the maniacal fanaticism of our white mental consciousness. . . . Hot-blooded sea-born Moby-Dick, Hunted by monomaniacs of the idea".

Into this many-rooted, many-branched conflict Melville has poured himself prodigally, spending his genius, his spirit, his strength upon the pursuit of the great theme. There is no question now of reserve and suppression; he has forgotten himself, he has identified himself with Ahab and the crew and the whale; his personality is submerged in the strife which he animates and informs with light. His own loneliness and loftiness of spirit, his communings, griefs and consolations—almost all that is expressed in his other books is here unexpressed but more subtly present. By an unlaboured, instinctive infusion he has passed into his creation, and is to be found

there, not in words so much as in spirit. Imagination not simply as a faculty of picture and metaphor-making, but as a strong shaping spirit—it is this that he uses, obedient as a horse to his hand, and swift as a horse to bear him to his desire. Extravagancies might well be pardoned in speaking of *Moby-Dick*, but they are not necessary, for there is no other book with which to compare it. A sea narrative such as Dana's is lacking in the primary power of Melville's, for it is a story of externals only, nor can one say more for such an excellent invention as Mr. Kipling's *Captains Courageous*; and it is, nevertheless, only with what are conveniently called sea-stories that *Moby-Dick* can be compared, since the sea is no mere background, but is numbered among the *dramatis personae*. What, however, removes Melville's work from comparison is his particular kind of imagination, or the particular direction of his imagination. It is active not simply in the material, but also in the spiritual sphere; it is a spiritual and moral imagination of visible and invisible worlds. "Oh, what quenchless feud is this, that Time hath with the sons of men!" cried Melville, in *Pierre*; and whatever form it takes, under whatever figure it may be expressed, the feud is quenchless, and the sons of men are partners in it. The common feud between man and man, the rarer feud between man and men, the subtler feud between man and woman, Melville ignores these—most of all this last humorous and tragic feud, so often and so briefly reconciled—and so ignoring them, passes on to the deeper, universal feud of man with fate and infinity. Ahab against the White Whale, like against like, man against himself, infinite against infinite:

under this aspect the conflict is heroic and desolate. The warmth of strife dies into the coldness of resistance, and stars mock the end.

Subordinate to this unique purpose there are a thousand strange and wonderful things floating in the sea of *Moby-Dick*. Never to be forgotten is the sermon preached by Father Mapple in the whaleman's conventicle. Preaching to whalemen and their black-liveried relicts, he preached such a sermon as Donne might have delivered to a people over whom the wrath of God hung hawk-like visible. Sombre in dehortation, noble in its familiar wave-like rhythm, it has something peculiarly Melvillian in its doctrine. "Woe to him who seeks to please rather than to appal! Woe to him whose good name is more to him than goodness! Woe to him who, in this world, courts not dishonour! Woe to him who would not be true, even though to be false were salvation. . . . Eternal delight and deliciousness will be his, who coming to lay him down, can say with his final breath—O Father! —chiefly known to me by Thy rod—mortal or immortal, here I die. I have striven to be Thine, more than to be this world's, or mine own. Yet this is nothing; I leave eternity to Thee; for what is man that he should live out the lifetime of his God?" Never to be forgotten, again, are certain digressive chapters, such as that concerning the whiteness of the whale, where a single magnificent paragraph, buoyant and shining with a light like that of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, becomes a prose hymn to whiteness, ending with fear and terror:—"and though among the holy pomps of the Romish faith, white is specially employed in the celebration of the Passion of our Lord;

though in the Vision of St. John, white robes are given to the redeemed, and the four-and-twenty elders stand clothed in white before the great white throne, and the Holy One that sitteth there white like wool; yet for all these accumulated associations, with whatever is sweet, and honourable, and sublime, there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood." True these digressions delay the progress of the story, and another episode is brought suddenly into the narrative, like a small craft swinging across the course of a great ship; but as nevertheless the crisis is slowly approached, digressions become less frequent, and nothing dulls the impact of that crisis upon the reader's sense and intelligence, nor obscures the metaphysical purpose. Indeed, there is something like design, the skill of a deliberate and consummate artist, in the effect produced by the recurring asides, the incidental excitements, the grave meditations, with which the latter half of *Moby-Dick* is diversified. Hamlet-like soliloquies, a Shakespearean idiot who breathes wisdom in his pleading fidelity, passages of the intensest dramatic value turning upon ordinary matters and vivifying the theme with continually fresh energy, these are not only singularly powerful in themselves; they are also powerful in their contributory effect.[1]

And of these scenes nothing is more wonderful and

[1] "People have criticized *Moby-Dick* because it is formless and full of irrelevancies; but the truth is that the irrelevancies are an essential part of its form, and had Melville attempted to reduce the bounds of his universe to the scene required for a slick story of the sea, that universe would not have been the

more overwhelming in its revelation of the native forces of the sea than the chapter "The Grand Armada"—a living Armada of whales herding in the Straits of Malacca and Sunda. Amid that strange, incredible multitude the "Pequod" was embayed at once, hunter and hunted; great regiments and infant nurseries, whales in friendly, fearless companies—"Like household dogs they came snuffling round us, right up to our gunwales, and touching them; till it almost seemed that some spell had suddenly domesticated them. Queequeg patted their foreheads; Starbuck scratched their backs with his lance; but fearful of the consequences, for the time refrained from darting it.

"But far beneath this wondrous world upon the surface, another and still stranger world met our eyes as we gazed over the side. For, suspended in those watery vaults, floated the forms of the nursing mothers of the whales, and those that by their enormous girth seemed shortly to become mothers. The lake, as I have hinted, was to a considerable depth exceedingly transparent; and as human infants while suckling will calmly and fixedly gaze away from the breast, as if leading two different lives at the time; and while yet drawing mortal nourishment, be still spiritually feasting upon some unearthly reminiscence:—even so did the young of these whales seem looking up towards us, but not at us, as if we were but a bit of gulf-weed in their new-born sight. Floating on their sides, the mothers also seemed quietly eyeing us.

multitudinous and terrible thing he sought to create." *Aesthetics, a Dialogue.* By Lewis Mumford. (Privately printed at the Troutbeck Press, New York, 1925.)

One of these little infants, that from certain queer tokens seemed hardly a day old, might have measured some fourteen feet in length, and some six feet in girth. He was a little frisky; though as yet his body seemed scarce yet recovered from that irksome position it had so lately occupied in the maternal reticule; where, tail to head, and all ready for the final spring, the unborn whale lies bent like a Tartar's bow. The delicate side-fins, and the palms of his flukes, still freshly retained the plaited crumpled appearance of a baby's ears newly arrived from foreign parts." He is describing in this and succeeding pages the "subtlest secrets of the seas . . . surrounded by circle upon circle of consternations and affrights".

Scarcely more wonderful, but more terrible and overpowering to the imagination that mounts with Melville's as the last scenes are unmasked, is the final narrative of the three-days' chase of the White Whale. Thrice the whale is attacked by Ahab's insane vindictiveness; the boats are smashed, Ahab killed, and then the "Pequod", herself done to death by Leviathan, fades into the sea.

"Diving beneath the settling ship, the whale ran quivering along its keel; but turning under water, swiftly shot to the surface again, far off the other bow, but within a few yards of Ahab's boat, where, for a time, he lay quiescent.

"'I turn my body from the sun. What ho, Tashtego! let me hear thy hammer. Oh! ye three unsurrendered spires of mine; thou uncracked keel; and only god-bullied hull; thou firm deck, and haughty helm, and Pole-pointed prow,—death-glorious ship! must ye then perish, and without me? Am I

cut off from the last fond pride of meanest shipwrecked captains? Oh, lonely death on lonely life! Oh, now I feel my topmost greatness lies in my topmost grief. Ho, ho! from all your furthest bounds, pour ye now in, ye bold billows of my whole foregone life, and top this one piled comber of my death! Toward thee I roll, thou all-destroying but unconquering whale; to the last I grapple with thee; from hell's heart I stab at thee; for hate's sake I spit my last breath at thee. Sink all coffins and all hearses to one common pool! and since neither can be mine, let me then tow to pieces, while still chasing thee, though tied to thee, thou damned whale! *Thus,* I give up the spear!'

"The harpoon was darted; the stricken whale flew forward; with igniting velocity the line ran through the groove—ran foul. Ahab stooped to clear it; he did clear it; but the flying turn caught him round the neck, and voicelessly as Turkish mutes bowstring their victim, he was shot out of the boat, ere the crew knew he was gone. Next instant, the heavy eye-splice in the rope's final end flew out of the stark-empty tub, knocked down an oarsman, and smiting the sea, disappeared in its depths.

"For an instant, the tranced boat's crew stood still; then turned. 'The ship? Great God, where is the ship?' Soon they through dim, bewildering mediums saw her sidelong fading phantom, as in the gaseous Fata Morgana; only the uppermost masts out of water; while fixed by infatuation, or fidelity, or fate, to their once lofty perches, the pagan harpooners still maintained their sinking look-outs on the sea. And now, concentric circles seized the lone boat itself,

and all its crew, and each floating oar, and every lance-pole, and spinning, animate and inanimate, all round and round in one vortex, carried the smallest chip of the 'Pequod' out of sight.

"But as the last whelmings intermixingly poured themselves over the sunken head of the Indian at the mainmast, leaving a few inches of the erect spar yet visible, together with long streaming yards of the flag, which calmly undulated, with ironical coincidings, over the destroying billows they almost touched;—at that instant, a red arm and a hammer hovered backwardly uplifted in the open air, in the act of nailing the flag faster and yet faster to the subsiding spar. A sky-hawk that tauntingly had followed the main-truck downward from its natural home among the stars, pecking at the flag, and incommoding Tashtego there; this bird now chanced to intercept its broad fluttering wing between the hammer and the wood; and simultaneously feeling that ethereal thrill, the submerged savage beneath, in his death-gasp, kept his hammer frozen there; and so the bird of heaven, with archangelic shrieks, and his imperial beak thrust upward, and his whole captive form folded in the flag of Ahab, went down with his ship, which, like Satan, would not sink to hell till she had dragged a living part of heaven along with her, and helmeted herself with it.

"Now small fowls flew screaming over the yet yawning gulf; a sullen white surf beat against its steep sides; then all collapsed, and the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago."

Not the least attractive feature of this prodigious invention is the voluble and vivid detail in which the

history and craft of whaling are set forth; for, as I have suggested, Melville's distinction lies partly in the fact that he inhabits contemporaneously two worlds. A recent book on whaling by Mr. Charles Boardman Hawes traces the development of the perilous trade, and bears constant witness, both direct and indirect, to the truth and comprehensiveness of Melville's accounts in *Moby-Dick*; page after page being cited to show what he can show better than any one else. Perhaps the most valuable instance is Mr. Hawes's account of the deliberate attack upon and sinking of a whaler by an infuriated whale, on 20th August 1851, only a few weeks before the publication of *Moby-Dick*; the intelligent deliberation of the whale that sank the "Ann Alexander", and the manœuvres of ship and whale, precisely remind a reader of the prolonged and cunning conflict that ended in the loss of the "Pequod". [1]

But now the whaling industry is almost dead, the harpoons that Queequeg and Tashtego flung from the boats of the "Pequod" were ousted by a harpoon gun of 1864, that exploded within the helpless creature a phial of sulphuric acid; and few are the ships needed now. Mr. Hawes says that a short time ago he went to New Bedford to see the fitting-out of the "Wanderer", last of the big whalers, and lost in August 1924; "when first she slid down the ways she joined some of the very ships that lay in port when hesitating Ishmael of *Moby-Dick* first passed 'The Crossed Harpoons' and 'The Swordfish Inn' ". The literality thus supported gives an additional value and fascination to Melville's narrative, for these

[1] See Appendix.

minutiae of whaling practice do not merely make a background for the emotional synthesis, but also supply the interest which the young have always found in the story of the great White Whale.

Real strength, says Melville, never impairs beauty or harmony, but often bestows it; in everything imposingly beautiful, strength has much to do with that magic. It is *strength* that survives as the dominant impression of *Moby-Dick*, if you ask what personal characteristic is chief. Strength first, but sadness next. The man that has more of joy than sorrow in him, he declares, cannot be true. The Man of Sorrows was the truest of all men, the truest of all books is Solomon's, and Ecclesiastes the fine-hammered steel of woe. Against this conviction no one need inveigh; it is Melville's conviction, and it shapes the character and destiny of his mad and tragical Captain Ahab. Sadness is at the heart of the fated hunter, and in the secret mood of the mates and crew of his ship—the sadness that comes from thinking, not from mere indulged melancholy. The disease of thought has sailed with the "Pequod", creeping through the crew, making them bold and desperate, but never glad, and loosening, you might think, the very rivets of the ship until the mere spout of Moby-Dick had power to dismember and destroy it. The disease of thought had assailed Melville himself, the energy of imagination rose to resist it, and out of that prolonged, incensed struggle *Moby-Dick* was born.

The intangible malignity which has been from the beginning—Melville's phrase cannot but recall the

work of a writer whom perhaps he never read, William Blake, the greatest of English mystics. But if Melville had never read Blake when he wrote *Moby-Dick* he had been gifted with somewhat of the same power of intuition and the same confidence in his intuition. He too has been called a mystic, and for once it may be admitted that the term is not improperly used. His whole apprehension of the world is mystical. He does not, like Blake, ignore the world, and never declares, as Blake did, that natural objects weaken, deaden and obliterate imagination in him. Nature means to Melville what it meant to another than Blake, to Wordsworth, whose apprehension of the unapparent was born of a steady gazing at the apparent. Susceptible as he was in an intense degree to the beauty and energy of natural phenomena, as *Moby-Dick* abundantly shows, that beauty and energy became as the screen through which he could endure to gaze at the Burning Bush. As was said a moment since, his Ahab is a Miltonic figure; but when we turn to Blake we can speak more precisely. In Blake's doctrine a central point is found in his assertion of a divine unity—even identity, God being seen as the original of Good and Evil alike, and Good and Evil two aspects of the one Power. Energy is Eternal Delight, is Blake's cry, and that is the avowed reverse of other gnomic perceptions, such as, "Energy, called Evil, is alone from the Body; and Reason, called Good, is alone from the Soul". Obscure because of contradictions as so much of Blake needs must seem, his unmistakable brightness in essentials sheds a strong light on Melville's attitude, especially in his imagination of Captain Ahab. Ahab's cardinal sin

is that of selfhood and single vision. He too might have mourned, in Blake's words:

I will go down to self-annihilation and eternal death
Lest the Last Judgement come and find me unannihilate,
And I be seized and given into the hands of my own Selfhood.

It is the burning concentration upon his own injury by the White Whale, his proud vindictive passion, that draws Ahab down to self-annihilation. The Energy that is eternal delight became in him evil, but delight and evil are both from God.

This conviction, implicit in Ahab's story, is but a part of the grand idea which *Moby-Dick* presents half in light and half in cloud, in the long slow course of the narrative. Immanent and immutable, the divinity of the unseen is opposed to the unstable apparitional visible world; the unseen haunts Ahab and his officers and the crew of the fated "Pequod", and all alike, in that years-long isolation, are exposed to visitations of the invisible. Hence even the "unreasoning" carpenter, who perhaps had not a soul, had a subtle something within that kept him endlessly soliloquizing; Starbuck ponders an unfathomable loveliness in all that his eye beholds, and cries, "Let faith oust fact; let fancy oust memory; I look deep down and do believe"; while Stubb, still irrepressible, leaps fish-like "in that same golden light", the beauty and truth of which is derived from its hidden fountain in the unapparent. How can this one small heart beat, breathes Ahab, imploring the darkness, and this one small brain think thoughts, unless God does that beating, does that thinking, does that living, and not I? For God is in all and beneath all and over all the

thoughts and deeds of the "Pequod", and slowly Ahab and his men have come to apprehend this wonderful, affrighting truth, taught by danger, solitude and silence during the long discipline of the voyage. Ahab is wiser in his madness than ever in his saneness, but his wisdom is defeated by his pride. He has seen God, but only as Lucifer might, from a deep inner hell. And his crew, too, have seen God (as masked by clouds), though with spirits not inflamed by the demonism that possessed their unhappy misleader.

If the doors of perception were cleansed, said Blake, everything would appear to man as it is—Infinite. To Ahab, with his exasperated perception, everything was infinite; and it seems that when Melville was looking back at his own whaling experiences, and seeing them through the eyes of his gigantically imagined Ahab, he saw everything as infinite. Nothing existed temporally or for itself, but all timelessly and in relation to an immanent Infinite. This "cleansed" perception was rare, but it endured during all the excitement of his writing of *Moby-Dick*. The matter of his speculations and his general proneness to metaphysics may have come as the result of his reading, though it was no philosopher but a poet—Dante himself—who "opened to his shuddering eyes the infinite cliffs and gulfs of human mystery and misery", if his remark concerning Pierre Glendinning may be transferred to his own story. But his spiritual perception was not learned, it was native. There is no evidence of any knowledge on his part of Blake's wild and exalted doctrines; few in England and probably none in America knew more than the name of Blake in 1851. But it has been commonly remarked that the great

mystics are essentially at one in their vision, and it is because Melville depended not upon "the Daughters of Memory", but upon "the Daughters of Inspiration", that he saw what others saw, and uttered in the great imagination of *Moby-Dick* the apprehension which others have uttered in verse, prayer and picture.

Imagination, as Blake declares, is eternity, and it was in eternity that Melville's spirit moved when he wrote his greatest book.

When *Moby-Dick* was published in 1851 it was received with a little respect and a great deal of derision. In England the *Examiner* lamented the author's carelessness and wilfulness, and found nothing since Tom Thumb to compare with the last tragedy of Ahab and the Whale. There was so much more about whales than any human interest that the critic could but deplore the fact that a writer of such imagination and mastery of language should have committed himself to such an extravaganza. The *Athenæum*, hostile and voluble, would not even concede a point for style, but denounced Melville's mad rather than bad English, the *dénouement* of the story, the frenzy of invention, the rant and the ravings. Unlike Mr. Hawes, the *Athenæum* would not allow any value even as history to this unfortunate masterpiece. "Mr. Melville has to thank himself only if his horrors and his heroics are flung aside by the general reader, as so much trash belonging to the worst school of Bedlam literature, since he seems not so much unable to learn as disdainful of learning the craft of an artist." The craft of criticism, as I am here reminded, is not less difficult, and reproaches may be spared. But that Melville himself was discouraged is clear, and except in two

shorter stories he never resumed the free powers of imagination that dictated *Moby-Dick*.

If it seems fantastic to compare *Moby-Dick* with Milton's *Paradise Lost* and assert a parallel conception in each, it will seem fantastic to say that in a shorter story, *Billy Budd*, may be found another *Paradise Regained*.

Like *Moby-Dick* this late and pure survival of Melville's genius has a double interest, the interest of story and the interest of psychology. *Billy Budd* is the narrative of one who, like Pierre, is unpractised in the ways of life and the hearts of other men; guilelessness is a kind of genius and the better part of innocence in this handsome young sailor. His offence is his innocence, and it is Claggart, a subtle, dark, demon-haunted petty-officer, that his innocence offends. Claggart's was the mania of an evil nature—the "natural depravity" of Plato's definition. Primarily he had been moved against Billy by his significant personal beauty, but not that alone; it was, more deeply, the simplicity of a nature which had never willed malice that pricked the morose malice of the master-at-arms. "One person excepted, the master-at-arms was perhaps the only man in the ship intellectually capable of adequately appreciating the moral phenomenon presented in Billy Budd, and the insight but intensified his passion, which, assuming various secret forms within him, at times assumed that of cynic disdain—disdain of innocence. To be nothing more than innocent!"

Strange psychology of the haunted! "When Claggart's unobserved glance happened to light on

belted Billy rolling along the upper gun-deck in the leisure of the second dog-watch, exchanging passing broadsides of fun with other young promenaders in the crowd, that glance would follow the cheerful sea-Hyperion with a settled meditative and melancholy expression, his eyes strangely suffused with incipient feverish tears. Then would Claggart look like the man of sorrows. Yes, and sometimes the melancholy expression would have in it a touch of soft yearning, as if Claggart could even have loved Billy but for fate and ban." Such relentings, alas, were transitory, and after a while Claggart, bent on the lad's destruction, sought an interview with the captain, and accused Billy of inciting to mutiny or of focussing a mutinous spirit in a warship still troubled with the remembrance of the Nore. Summoned to meet the charge Billy is horrified, overwhelmed, dumb; and Captain Vere, divining the nervous agony that locked the boy's lips, spoke soothingly—"There is no hurry, my boy. Take your time, take your time"; for he himself could not believe the charge. "Contrary to the effect intended, these words, so fatherly in tone, doubtless touching Billy's heart to the quick, prompted yet more violent efforts at utterance—efforts soon ending for the time in confirming the paralysis, and bringing to the face an expression which was as a crucifixion to behold. The next instant, quick as the flame from a discharged cannon at night, his right arm shot out, and Claggart dropped to the deck. Whether intentionally, or but owing to the young athlete's superior height, the blow had taken effect full upon the forehead, so shapely and intellectual-looking a feature in the master-at-arms; so that the body fell over length-

wise, like a heavy plank tilted from erectness. A gasp or two, and he lay motionless."

The perjurer had been struck dead—"by an angel of God. Yet the angel must hang!" cried the captain, understanding in a flash all that had not been told. At the drum-head court which was instantly called, the captain spoke in a subtle, yearning, remorseless way, his own heart touched, but discipline still ruling his speech; reminding the court that the heart is a piteous woman. "The heart is the feminine in man, and hard though it be, she must here be ruled out." With the captain's solemn reminders ringing in the cabin, the court found the handsome sailor guilty and sentenced him to be hanged next morning; and it was the captain himself who announced this to Billy in an interview of which the author himself can offer only the obscurest conjectures. "He was old enough to have been Billy's father. The austere devotee of military duty, letting himself melt back into what remains primeval in our formalized humanity, may in the end have caught Billy to his heart, even as Abraham may have caught young Isaac on the brink of resolutely offering him up in obedience to the exacting behest. But there is no telling the sacrament—seldom if in any case revealed to the gadding world. . . . There is privacy at the time, inviolable to the survivor; and holy oblivion, the sequel to each diviner magnanimity, providentially covers all at last." So strong was the effect on the captain of this agony of communion that the senior lieutenant, meeting him, could see that of the two it was the condemned that suffered less than his judge.

Morning brought the final scene, to which with

unlabouring imagination Melville imparts a strange serenity and solemn ease. "Billy stood facing aft. At the penultimate moment his words, his only ones, words wholly unobstructed in the utterance, were these—'God bless Captain Vere!' Syllables so unanticipated coming from one with the ignominious hemp about his neck—a conventional felon's benediction directed aft toward the quarters of honour; syllables, too, delivered in the clear melody of a singing-bird on the point of launching from the twig, had a phenomenal effect, not unenhanced by the rare personal beauty of the young sailor, spiritualized now through late experiences so poignantly profound.

"Without volition, as it were, as if indeed the ship's populace were the vehicles of some vocal current-electric, with one voice, from alow and aloft, came a resonant echo—'God bless Captain Vere!' And yet at that instant Billy alone must have been in their hearts, even as he was in their eyes.

"At the pronounced words and the spontaneous echo that voluminously rebounded them, Captain Vere, either through stoic self-control or a sort of momentary paralysis induced by emotional shock, stood erectly rigid as a musket in the ship-armourer's rack.

"The hull, deliberately recovering from the periodic roll to leeward, was just regaining an even keel, when the last signal, the preconcerted dumb one, was given. At the same moment it chanced that the vapoury fleece hanging low in the east was shot through with a soft glory as of the fleece of the Lamb of God seen in mystical vision, and simultaneously therewith, watched by the wedged mass of upturned faces, Billy

ascended; and ascending, took the full rose of the dawn.

"In the pinioned figure, arrived at the yard-end, to the wonder of all, no motion was apparent save that created by the slow roll of the hull, in moderate weather so majestic in a great ship heavy-cannoned."

Exaltation of spirit redeems such a scene from burdens which otherwise might appear too painful to be borne. And beyond this, it is innocence that is vindicated, more conspicuously in death than it could be in life. Melville's MS. contains a note in his own hand —"A story not unwarranted by what happens in this incongruous world of ours—innocence and infirmary, spiritual depravity and fair respite"; the ultimate opposition is shown clearly here in this public vindicaton of the law, and the superior assertion at the very moment of death of the nobility of a pure human spirit. *Moby-Dick* ends in darkness and desolation, for the challenge of Ahab's pride is rebuked by the physical power and the inhumanness of Nature; but *Billy Budd* ends in a brightness of escape, such as the apostle saw when he exclaimed, "O death, where is thy sting!"

Finished but a few months before the author's death and only lately published, *Billy Budd* shows the imaginative faculty still secure and powerful, after nearly forty years' supineness, and the not less striking security of Melville's inward peace. After what storms and secret spiritual turbulence we do not know, except by hints which it is easy to exaggerate, in his last days he re-enters an Eden-like sweetness and serenity, "with calm of mind, all passion spent", and sets his brief, appealing tragedy for witness that evil is defeat and natural goodness invincible in the

affections of man. In this, the simplest of stories, told with but little of the old digressive vexatiousness, and based upon recorded incidents, Herman Melville uttered his everlasting yea, and died before a soul had been allowed to hear him.

CHAPTER VIII

OTHER PROSE

With the exception of *Pierre*, already noticed, *Israel Potter* is the chief of the prose works published in Melville's lifetime after *Moby-Dick*. Its sub-title, "Fifty Years of Exile", indicates accurately the fortune that fell to Israel and the point of view from which it is told. A subdued ironical note is heard, but nowhere in the story so clearly as in the Dedication of this tribute to "a private of Bunker Hill, who for his faithful services was years ago promoted to a still deeper privacy under the ground, with a posthumous pension, in default of any during life, annually paid him by the spring in ever-new mosses and sward". No one, he owns, can complain of the gloom of the closing chapters more profoundly than the author; but what can he do? The story is a true one, he avers, and he dare not substitute for God's justice any artistic recompense of poetic justice.

The irony is not confined to the story; it extends to the habit assumed by the author in writing it. As if the attacks and sneers at his natural exuberance had indeed entered his soul, he resolved no more to cast his style to the swine but to restrict himself to the dry

husks of language, putting an unnatural constraint upon his genius. In part this constraint brings a benefit to the reader, but it makes *Israel Potter* a much less characteristic book than its predecessors. The story (founded upon a life published in 1824) opens a little before the American War, in which Israel is found fighting at Bunker Hill against the English forces; he was wounded, recovered, volunteered for the American navy, was immediately captured and sent to England, and endured the horrors of the hulks. It was the beginning of lifelong vicissitudes with little intermission, vicissitudes admirably followed in a manner that makes the story almost as faithful but, alas, less attractive than *Colonel Jack*. Admirable, above all, is the account of the humble American rebel's interviews with George the Third, Horne Tooke, Paul Jones, and Benjamin Franklin; to the last of whom he had been sent as a secret agent with despatches to Paris from Horne Tooke's group. Scarce anything extraneous is permitted, but Melville is indulgent in his portrait of Franklin and Paul Jones, giving these at full length—Franklin the serene, cool, ripe old philosopher, "everything but a poet"; and the adventurer, "a rather small, elastic, swarthy man, with an aspect as of a disinherited chief in European clothes. An unvanquishable enthusiasm, intensified to perfect sobriety, couched in his savage, self-possessed eye". It is only when he writes of Paul Jones that Melville's style rises to the familiar exaltation, as if the vehemence of the varnished savage were still irresistible.

The visits to Paris are clearly reminiscences of Melville's own brief sojourn there a few years before

the publication of *Israel Potter* in 1855, and this is another reminder of his readiness to use his experiences directly and freshly, with but little attempt at disguise; and whenever his narrative requires, he will use historical incidents no less simply, though with an apology. Thus with the magnificent account of the battle between "Bon Homme Richard" and the "Serapis": he mentions it only because he must needs follow in every event the fortunes of Israel himself, but the apology does not prevent his describing it with intensest vividness, nor asking at the end, "What separates the enlightened man from the savage? Is civilization a thing distinct, or is it an advanced stage of barbarism?" The grim texture of *Israel Potter* makes it difficult to doubt the author's conviction.

At times Melville's reliance upon the inventions of history seems curious enough, as though he thought that, in the new effort to be plain and realistic, he must needs adopt the facts themselves as well as the manner of relating them. When Israel, wonderfully imposing upon a British warship, is carried to Falmouth, he sees "Ethan (Ticonderoga) Allen, the unconquered soldier", in captivity, a New England officer of gigantic strength and courage, whose confinement in fetters was a dishonour, scarce redeemed by his exchange after more than two-and-a-half years' restraint. This, however, was to be the last of the unfortunate Israel's encounters with daylight characters; he was for more than forty years to disappear, "as one entering at dusk into a thick wood". And there, his chronicler adds, were to be revealed to him, in the secret clefts, gulfs, caves, and dens of London, things of unsurpassed horror.

It fits with this dark dishumour that Melville should afterwards have been strongly attracted to James Thomson and his grim *City of Dreadful Night*. . . . Happily, this record is condensed into a few pages; the most sombre chapters are short ones, as though Melville himself could not for long face the misery he had conjured up; it was Israel in Egypt indeed, the Egypt being London of filth, fog and sewerage, and his exile, like that of the Hebrews, lasting forty years, only sweetened at the end by the unanticipated good fortune of returning to Boston half a century after he had been torn away as a prisoner of war. "He died the same day that the oldest oak on his native hills was blown down." The end closes a page of simplest pathos, and a story chiefly remarkable for what is suppressed, and the difficult restraint of its telling. That the restraint was galling, and the result not justified in his own eyes or the public's, may be assumed from the fact that the experiment of *Israel Potter* was not repeated. The book is of a singular and rapid interest, but it is far from being valuably and typically Herman Melville's, for in it he is exiled from the native world of his imagination.

The Confidence-Man of 1857 was the last lengthy novel of Melville's. He was to live between thirty and forty years longer, in a hushed life of which the external world could see only the externals, and the last intimacy offered to his readers, on any considerable scale, was this novel which showed—so surely that you might think it deliberate—that the writer of the noblest of prose epics was the writer also of the vainest of satires.

Few men are entitled by a special genius to regard their fellows satirically. To satirize human institutions, literary or religious conventions, is one thing and may be a healthy exercise, but to satirize man as man, the time as the time, to satirize *generally,* is another thing, and can only be justified by a genius like that of Swift or Voltaire. Lesser minds have indulged in satire for which only large minds may be pardoned. The satire of the small mind—the inverted sentimentalist's mind—degenerates into sneers, and expresses nothing so much as a simple desire to belittle. It is the satirist's true office to reveal, reproportion and re-establish; diminishing being but a preliminary and perhaps not even essential task. Most of us are at times ready to usurp this office, and most of us are at times conscious that the natural result of usurping it is spite, injustice, or mere universal vulgarity.

Melville's satire in *The Confidence-Man* fails completely, but it does not fail because of its spite, or injustice, or vulgarity. Its failure is at once better and worse—a failure in intelligence. Here is a novel laboured out to the extent of a hundred thousand words (with a half promise of more), for the vain purpose of exposing the hypocrisy and assertiveness of passengers on a steamship. The steamship is, it is true, a world in little, the characters may be life-like—an unhappy concession—but the eye that surveys them is eccentric and obscure; a double incapacity. Meanness there is none, nor any petty exultation, but nevertheless one cannot help seeing that Melville's basis for satire is not philosophical; it is rather the sense of personal failure. The author of *Moby-Dick,*

conscious of its uniqueness—the supreme privilege of authorship—was conscious also that he could not live by producing masterpieces; and this, the last of his disillusionments, dictated the mood of *The Confidence-Man,* and made the book an abortion.

"His Masquerade" is the sub-title of *The Confidence-Man.* The steamer "Fidele", leaving St. Louis for New Orleans, is the scene of this masquerade, of which the true meaning is hopelessly obscure. A mute who writes on a slate St. Paul's sentences concerning Charity, and exhibits them to his fellow-passengers, a barber who exhibits for countersign "No trust", a grotesque black cripple—focus of conflicting remarks—swindlers and their prey, idlers reading a pamphlet entitled *Ode on the Intimations of Distrust in Man, etc., etc.,* a vendor of the Samaritan Pain Dissuader and his reluctant victims; a herd of transcendentalists, philanthropists and misanthropes, mental and physical quacks, the abjects of a crude civilization,—these in their unrestrained volubility compose the matter of this satire. "Such deadly, leaden people; such systematic plodding, weary, insupportable heaviness; such a mass of animated indigestion in respect of all that was genial, jovial, frank, social, or hearty, never, sure, was brought together elsewhere since the world began. . . ." Dickens's phrases of a similar journey up the Mississippi, as described in *American Notes,* may well be applied to Melville's dismal gang. "God defend me from Irony and Satire, his bosom friend", cries one of these; and "Amen, Amen, Amen!" echoes the dismayed reader. Melville himself was aware of something amiss in his scheme, and has devoted a whole chapter

to his apology. How unreal all this is! some one murmurs; and he answers:

"Strange, that in a work of amusement this severe fidelity to real life should be exacted by any one, who by taking up such a work, sufficiently shows that he is not unwilling to drop real life, and turn, for a time, to something different. . . . There is another class, and with this class we side, who sit down to a work of amusement tolerantly." He goes on to say that as, in real life, the proprieties will not allow people to act out themselves with the unreserve of the stage, so in books they look not only for more entertainment, but *for more reality than real life shows;* and he sums up in a golden phrase: It is with fiction as with religion, presenting another world but one to which we feel the tie. Admirable doctrine, if only he had observed it in *The Confidence-Man* as in *Moby-Dick*! It is not in *The Confidence-Man* that this ideal and closer reality is shown, but in the great story of the whale, in which the vastest imagination is in harmony with experience, though exceeding common experience.

Sometimes, it is true, sardonic reflections give a little brief savour to this queer mixture, as when a projector desires to quicken foreign missions with the Wall Street spirit; urging that the conversion of the heathen should be let out on contract—so much by bid for converting India, so much for Africa, and so on. The Archimedean money-power would effect what eighteen centuries had failed in. "I am for sending ten thousand missionaries in a body and converting the Chinese *en masse* within six months of the debarkation." But even these mild amusements are few, and when the narrator speaks himself it is

thus: "Analogically, he couples the slanting cut of the equivocator's coat-tails with the sinister cast in his eye; he weighs slyboot's sleek speech in the light imparted by the oblique import of the smooth slope of his worn boot-heels; the insinuator's undulating flunkeyisms dovetail into those of the flunkey beast that windeth his way on his belly."

Irresistibly this unfortunate novel reminds one of the American scenes of *Martin Chuzzlewit,* written, it may be remembered, as the result of Dickens's visit to America in 1842. Martin Chuzzlewit's America has been called a madhouse, and Melville's travelling Americans are among the inmates—all drearily mad together. Melville supports Dickens's worst charges, though Dickens was writing some fourteen years before *The Confidence-Man* was—I had almost said planned, and though with his proud national consciousness he would have hesitated before exposing his country and his work to such an observation. The whole truth is that Melville wrote this misconceived book when he was most unhappy and perplexed, and for a time the unhappiness of the author became visible in the wryness of his work. Sometimes his instinct triumphs and lovely phrases are heard amid the crude jargoning of this "masquerade", as though the light-seeking instinct could not be repressed; but the jargoning is heard again as the incredible story drags on to silence.

The Piazza Tales antedated *The Confidence-Man* by nearly a year. It contains six stories, of which two are superb and the rest comparatively insignificant. The whole six were first published in magazines, the volume collecting them was published simultaneously in America and in England, and here at any rate has

been forgotten. One of the stories, "Bartleby", is an exercise in unrelieved pathos, the pathos of an exile in city life, faint counterpart of Melville's own isolation and gathering silence. Something unbearable peers out of this story, to wring the heart of the reader, as the simple episodes of the life of a mute forlorn innocent are unfolded—type of all the ineffectual, the wounded and unwanted. "Strangely huddled at the base of the wall, his knees drawn up, and lying on his side, his head touching the cold stones, I saw the wasted Bartleby. But nothing stirred. I paused; then went close up to him; stooped over, and saw that his dim eyes were open; otherwise he seemed profoundly sleeping. Something prompted me to touch him. I felt his hand, when a tingling shiver ran up my arm and down my spine to my feet. 'Eh!—He's asleep, ain't he?'—'With kings and counsellors,' murmured I." It is only after this noblest, briefest elegy that the queer clue to Bartleby's luckless life is displayed; he had been employed in the Dead Letter Office and suddenly lost his position. "Conceive a man by nature and misfortune prone to a pallid hopelessness; can any business seem more fitted to heighten it than that of continually handling these dead letters, and assorting them for the flames?" Ironic postscript to simplest pathos!

Pathos is absent from the greatest of these stories, "Benito Cereno", or rather is shut out by a more urgent passion. It is the story of Captain Delano, who watches from his ship the odd manœuvres of a strange sail—a Spanish ship carrying merchandise and black slaves. It was the "San Dominick", of sinister aspect—"each letter streakingly corroded with trick-

lings of copper-spike rust; while, like mourning weeds, dark festoons of sea-grass slimily swept to and fro over the name, with every hearse-like roll of the waves". The "San Dominick's" captain, Benito Cereno himself, a gilded, richly-dressed figure, looked ill and wretched, and was attended by a short negro with obvious affection and zeal. Disorder and indiscipline were everywhere apparent, and when Delano offered help it was curtly declined. Cereno's mind surely was unhinged, his manner resentful and splenetic or coldly sullen. Pressed to give Delano the story of his ship's misfortunes, he cannot speak coherently or convincingly, and is repeatedly checked by his cough and upheld by the black servant stooped over him like a begging Franciscan. All that Delano observes on the slaver makes him doubtful and uneasy; he understands nothing, and, though the simplest and least suspicious of men, he suspects everything—the few Spanish sailors, the many blacks, the sick captain, all save the black servant. Cereno was like one flayed alive—"where may one touch him without causing a shrink?"—or at best a cadaverous moroseness sat on him while Captain Delano, anxious with assistance, hovered near; yet adding to mystery, in a sudden agitated parting, the sick man brimmed with thanks as Delano left the sinister "San Dominick". And then:

"Seating himself in the stern, Captain Delano, making a last salute, ordered the boat shoved off. The crew had their oars on end. The bowsmen pushed the boat a sufficient distance for the oars to be lengthwise dropped. The instant that was done, Don Benito sprang over the bulwarks, falling at the feet of

Captain Delano; at the same time calling towards his ship, but in tones so frenzied, that none in the boat could understand him. But, as if not equally obtuse, three sailors, from three different and distant parts of the ship, splashed into the sea, swimming after their captain, as if intent upon his rescue." The black servant followed, and in the midst of his perplexity Captain Delano saw that when the negro was dragged into the boat he aimed a dagger at the heart of his master, Benito Cereno. "That moment, across the long-benighted mind of Captain Delano, a flash of revelation swept, illuminating, in unanticipated clearness, his host's whole mysterious demeanour, with every enigmatic event of the day, as well as the entire past voyage of the 'San Dominick'. He smote Babo's hand down, but his own heart smote him harder. With infinite pity he withdrew his hold from Don Benito. Not Captain Delano, but Don Benito, the black, in leaping into the boat, had intended to stab."

Now the mystery was unmasked. The slaves were in bloody revolt and the masters of the "San Dominick".

All the story is not unfolded immediately; part is told by direct narration of what Delano saw, and part is collected from the declaration made by Benito Cereno when at length, a sick mind in a wasting body, he is put ashore. The slaves had seized the ship, murdered Cereno's friend and partner with others, and spared Cereno himself only for the terrors of navigating the ship as a slave to slaves. They had even planned the seizure of Delano's ship as well, and it was, in fact, their audacity that hurried Cereno into escape as the means of saving his benefactor. Horrors are told or

hinted at which cannot be touched save in Melville's own words, but the chief impression of horror is conveyed in this simple and brief dialogue:

"'You generalize,' said Delano, 'and mournfully enough. But the past is past; why moralize upon it? Forget it. See, yon bright sun has forgotten it all, and the blue sea, and the blue sky; these have turned over new leaves.'

"'Because they have no memory,' he dejectedly replied; 'because they are not human.'

"'But these mild Trades that now fan your cheek, do they not come with a human-like healing to you? Warm friends, steadfast friends are the Trades.'

"'With their steadfastness they but waft me to my tomb, señor,' was the foreboding response.

"'You are saved,' cried Captain Delano, more and more astonished and pained; 'you are saved: what has cast such a shadow upon you?'

"'The negro.'"

The full significance of this amazing invention could not be discovered until the late Joseph Conrad had written certain stories which, by their subjects and method of narration, offer inevitable reminders of Melville's short masterpiece. The American Captain Delano is a Conradian figure in his simplicity and slightly exaggerated obtuseness, the Spanish Captain is Conradian in his rich figure and mystery-making phrases and silences; the servant is Conradian, and the crowding business of the ferocious blacks; and, above all, the method of broken and oblique narration is Conradian. Anticipating Conrad's abundant short stories by fifty years, Melville has anticipated their excellence and given us a measure to measure them by.

It is improbable that Conrad had the opportunity of reading a book which disappeared from currency so completely as *The Piazza Tales* did, and the likeness is emphasized here simply as sign of some spiritual likeness between the American novelist and the Polish novelist, which others may more fully trace.

The other story in this volume, "The Encantadas", told in several sketches, is not less tragical and not less intensely realized. The scene is the Gallipagos, the Enchanted Islands of the Pacific, and the eighth sketch relates the story of the Chola widow of Norfolk Isle. A white sign was seen hanging from an inland rock, half a mile from the shore, and a boat being despatched returned with a solitary woman. She was a half-breed Indian, Hunilla, who had gone thither with her husband and her brother and dogs to obtain tortoise oil. By ill hap both men were dashed to death on the sharp-toothed reef. "Before Hunilla's eyes they sank. The real woe of this event passed before her sight as some sham tragedy on the stage. . . . And there, the invisible painter painted to her view the wave-tossed and disjointed raft, its once level logs slantingly upheaved, as raking masts, and the four struggling arms undistinguishable among them; and then all subsided into smooth-flowing creamy waters, slowly drifting the splintered wreck; while first and last, no sound of any sort was heard. Death in a silent picture; a dream of the eye; such vanishing shapes as the mirage shows." Hunilla found her husband's body—"I buried him, my life, my soul!"—and then sought her brother's corpse from the waves; "but they bore nothing to her but a dirge, which maddened her to think that murderers should mourn".

The ship that had brought the three to Norfolk Isle had promised to call for their return; the widowed Hunilla waited for it in vain. She still hoped and yearned, notching the days on a drifted reed until after a hundred and eighty no more notches were made for all the days that followed. An experience had befallen Hunilla, scarce hinted at in this painful record, except when it is asked if any whalers had visited the island, and then: "But no, I will not file this thing complete for scoffing souls to quote, and call it firm proof upon their side. The half shall here remain untold. Those two unnamed events which befell Hunilla on this isle, let them abide between her and her God. In nature, as in law, it may be libellous to speak some truths."

The episode, almost too slight to be called a story, ends with Hunilla's rescue and the cruel, enforced abandonment of all the dogs but two. She appeared not to feel this abandonment, for pain seemed so necessary to her that pain in other beings, though by love and sympathy made her own, was unrepiningly to be borne. Sombre conclusion!—"The last seen of lone Hunilla she was passing into Payta town, riding upon a small grey ass; and before her on the ass's shoulders, she eyed the jointed workings of the beast's armorial cross." Lowell said that this passage brought tears into his eyes—the finest touch of genius he had seen in prose. In such a sentence does Melville reveal completely the humanity and the richness of his imagination; and since it has been thought that he is deficient in human sympathy the whole picture of Hunilla, so burningly compassionate, might well be shown in proof of his own phrase in this story—

"Humanity, thou strong thing, I worship thee, not in the laurelled victor, but in this vanquished one".

The rest of Melville's prose is collected into a volume of the standard edition entitled *Billy Budd and Other Prose Pieces.* The title-piece has already been looked at, and the rest are stories or sketches from magazines, and a few previously unpublished articles printed from the author's manuscript. Poor enough in interest are certain of these. One, "Cock-a-Doodle-Doo!" shows clearly the influence of Hawthorne, and another, "I and my Chimney", as has already been suggested, shows it even more frankly; each was written after Melville had been drawn into the orbit of Hawthorne, fascinated by that mysterious, supple, sly figure, as some great warrior beast by the apparition of a watching snake in the grass. There are soft meditative passages, languid, faintly humorous passages, and self-portrayal in disguise; but the interest of such sketches is sustained only by the personality of the author, and few will complain that they were so long uncollected. Praise be to God for the failure, cries a character in one of these sketches:—Melville was often contemplating the world from the point of view of one who had failed, and this phrase falls unambiguously from his lips in a story published three years after *Moby-Dick.* The same moral, and more explicitly, is shown in "The Fiddler";—"crammed once with fame, he is now hilarious without it. *With* genius and *without* fame, he is happier than a king. More a prodigy now than ever." The contrast between the admired and the unesteemed—the same man, the same genius, the

different regard—is disclosed in terms that make it irresistible to conclude that the neglected Melville is speaking of the once-admired writer.

It is hardly possible that Melville was unaware of Hawthorne's influence, but he did little, apparently, to suppress it, and paid his friend an unusually confident tribute in the lengthy article to which reference has been made in an earlier chapter. It is the least part of genius that attracts admiration, he cries, speaking of himself in speaking of Hawthorne; and in thinking of Hawthorne, again, he leaps to Shakespeare with, "It is those deep, far-away things in him; those occasional flashings-forth of the intuitive Truth in him; those short, quick probings at the very axis of reality;—these are the things that make Shakespeare, Shakespeare". He declares (with the consciousness of all the untold within himself), that the immediate products of a great mind are not so great as the undeveloped or even undevelopable greatness; "in Shakespeare's tomb lies infinitely more than Shakespeare ever wrote". Melville magnifies him not so much for what he did as for what he did not do, or refrained from doing.

"In this world of lies, Truth is forced to fly like a scared white doe in the woodlands; and only by cunning glimpses will she reveal herself, as in Shakespeare and other masters of the great Art of Telling the Truth,—even though it be covertly and by snatches."

It was no matter of surprise, he declared, that Hawthorne was as yet mistaken among men, but content meanwhile with the still rich utterance of a great intellect in repose. And if, as a part of this

general lack of apprehension, men should cavil at the naming of Shakespeare and Hawthorne on the same page, he denies that Shakespeare must needs be regarded as unapproachable, and a national proud fervour seizes him as he proceeds to declare that men not very much inferior to Shakespeare are this day being born on the banks of the Ohio. Alas for prophecy! But he is completely right in repudiating the notion that the great literary genius to come will come as an Elizabethan, for great geniuses are parts of the times, they *are* the times. "It is of a piece with the Jews, who, while their Shiloh was meekly walking in their streets, were still praying for his magnificent coming; looking for him in a chariot, who was already among them on an ass." Melville was not an analytical critic, but his was the precious gift of sympathetic imagination, by which he divined what others fumble after. His comparisons on Hawthorne's behalf are deadly:—Washington Irving is but a very popular and amiable imitator, and it is better to fail in originality than to succeed in imitation. He who has never failed somewhere, that man cannot be great. For Melville thirsts after the ultimate success of the imagination, as saints thirst after righteousness.

And more:—he asks for no American Goldsmiths or Miltons. Let the American writer write like a man, for then he will be sure to write like an American. England is an alien to America, and China has more bonds of real love for America than England has. "It is for the nation's sake, and not for her authors' sake, that I would have America be heedful of the increasing greatness among her writers. For how

great the shame, if other nations should be before her, in crowning the heroes of the pen!" There were hardly five critics in all America, and of these several were asleep.

This eloquent and passionate plea for a self-reliant spirit, for insularity and nationhood, fell on deaf ears; as a tribute to Hawthorne it may have awakened readers, as a call to the vindication of American genius, and the freeing of genius from foreign fetters, it was unheard. From 1850, when this superb essay was written, to 1926, when the present commentary is published, America has gone like the Jews a-whoring after strange gods, worshipping French idols, Japanese and Chinese idols, even bowing before English idols; forgetting America in a desire to become European or Asiatic. But the strength is within that sustains a man, or a nation.

CHAPTER IX

POEMS

In 1866, nine years after his last novel, Melville published *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War,* dedicated to the memory of the three hundred thousand who fell in the war for the maintenance of the Union.

The impulse to verse was not quite so late and sudden as Melville's own phrase suggests when he refers it to the fall of Richmond in April 1865. His wife said in a letter of 1859 that he had taken to writing poetry, and in a letter to his brother in 1862, Melville himself speaks of his own "doggerel". His longest poem, *Clarel,* recording faithfully his tour in the Holy Land in 1856-57, was not published until after *Battle-Pieces,* but his diary of the tour, and the obvious faithfulness with which he follows it in the verse, suggests that *Clarel* may well have been written years before it was printed.

That the impulse prompting *Battle-Pieces* was sincere and powerful is apparent as soon as the poems are looked at. It is not and could not be wholly a cheerful volume, for the first poem (1860) is called "Misgivings", and the successive pieces, often

precisely dated, reflect the gloomy courses of the long futile agony.

I muse upon my country's ills—
The tempest bursting from the waste of Time
On the world's fairest hope linked with man's foulest crime.

Many of the poems are not left to speak for themselves, but are supported with notes not less apprehensive, one of them for instance, "The Conflict of Convictions"—a poem curiously concerned with abstractions such as derision and hope and necessity—being followed with a note on the gloomy lull of the winter of 1860-61, seemingly big with disaster, and the eclipse that had darkened the promise of the French Revolution. Lament is uttered for "The Stone Fleet", the sixteen old whalers that were filled with stone, stripped from farm walls and pastures, and sunk in the channel leading to the harbours of Charleston and Savannah in a vain effort to block the passage; ample revenge for the attempt being taken by Semmes in the "Alabama" and Waddell in the "Shenandoah", the latter capturing as many as twenty-five whalers in a week; the hapless captains sometimes being unaware that war had been declared, as the unscrupulous Waddell concealed the report that it had ended. Melville's lament is poignant and impressive:

I have a feeling for those ships,
Each worn and ancient one,
With great bluff bows, and broad in the beam:
Ay, it was unkindly done,
But so they serve the Obsolete—
Even so, Stone Fleet!

You'll say I'm doting: do but think
I scudded round the Horn in one—
The Tenedos, a glorious
Good old craft as ever run—
Sunk (how all unmeet!)
With the Old Stone Fleet.

An Indian ship of fame was she,
Spices and shawls and fans she bore;
A whaler when her wrinkles came—
Turned off! till, spent and poor,
Her bones were sold (escheat!)
Ah! Stone Fleet.

—"And all for naught. The waters pass . . . *Nature is nobody's ally.*"

Equally touching, both in subject and lingering music, is "Lyon", Nathaniel Lyon being the captain in the regular army who held Missouri against the Southern forces, until his death in August 1861, the date of Melville's dirge.

Some hearts there are of deeper sort,
Prophetic, sad,
Which yet for cause are trebly clad;
Known death they fly on:
This wizard-heart and heart-of-oak had Lyon. . . .

By candlelight he wrote the will,
And left his all
To Her for whom 'twas not enough to fall;
Loud neighed Orion
Without the tent; drums beat; we marched with Lyon. . . .

"General, you're hurt—this sleet of balls!"
He seemed half spent;
With moody and bloody brow, he lowly bent:
"The field to die on;
But not—not yet; the day is long," breathed Lyon.

For a time becharmed there fell a lull
In the heart of the fight;
The tree-tops nod, the slain sleep light;
Warm noon-winds sigh on,
And thoughts which he never spake had Lyon.

In both these poems, and not in these alone, there is a singular anticipation of the tenderer mood and echoing music of a poet of our own day, Thomas Hardy. *Battle-Pieces,* indeed, might be exactly matched by many battle-pieces from *Wessex Poems.* Like Mr. Hardy, Melville loves rhyme and its more prolonged and complicated effects, and like Mr. Hardy he has a strangely pleasant awkwardness in handling the stanzas he is so fond of, as if the bell-ropes of his verse had chafed his hands, and a little hesitation and a little roughness are often noticeable. He is naturally at his best and easiest in the solemn movement of a requiem, as in that on the costly victory of Shiloh and those that fell there:

Now they lie low,
While over them the swallows skim
And all is hushed at Shiloh.

He can nevertheless aspire to a bolder tune in a poem on the defeat of the wooden ship by iron:

But splendours wane. The sea-fight yields
No front of old display;
The garniture, emblazonment,
And heraldry all decay;

and again in an elegy on Stonewall Jackson, and in "The Armies of the Wilderness", in which Mr. Kipling and not Mr. Hardy is anticipated. All the poems in this volume reveal Melville's immediate

response to the event of the hour, and especially whatever event touched the general heart of the North; for he regarded himself as the mouthpiece of "the people", most explicitly in the dirge on Lincoln's death—"Beware the People weeping when they bare the iron hand". He responded immediately as he felt, and his war poems are the most direct of war poetry; yet, unlike so much war poetry, they gain rather than lose by their direct expressiveness. True this immediacy does not give him an unfailing security, for some of the battle-pieces are merely and too literally battle-pieces, a hasty journalism in rhyme; just as in other pieces he gives, for poetry, philosophy in verse; yet in his direct utterance of common and noble impulses he achieved a pure poetry. The common and ignoble impulses which war may too often awake find no expression here, but he breathes instead a fine and human generosity; shall nobleness aspire less in victory than in reverse, he asks, pleading against a cry he deems vindictive. Else, indeed, is his sudden terror justified (in Hardy-like phrases):

> So, then, Solidity's a crust—
> The core of life below;
> All may go well for many a year,
> But who can think without a fear
> Of horrors that happen so?

Silent the *victors* stood, is the attitude of his spirit, when at last peace crept back to an exhausted land. And rightly, he urges in a prose supplement to these battle-pieces, rightly will more forbearance be required from the North than the South, for the North is victor.

On the whole, the conclusion from a close study

will be the same as the conclusion from a first reading, that the chief value in these poems is found in their matter, the manner being, ultimately, inadequate to the fineness and nobility of the themes. Melville was not a born poet, but in these his earliest poems, written when the instinct for prose had been baffled and his highest work had been done, he found an impulse which at once sustained him and revealed his deficiency in poetic form. His infallible prose rhythm did not help him to avoid faulty verse rhythms, and he laboured too little at the technique of verse. His forms are varied, but his rhythm is not often varied and not often very personal. But he has music, music most beautifully heard in the opening of "Sheridan at Cedar Creek":

> Shoe the steed with silver
> That bore him to the fray,
> When he heard the guns at dawning—
> Miles away;
> When he heard them calling, calling—
> Mount, nor stay.

But he was at the mercy of a tune, and lacking a tune his verse lacks its best quality.

Twenty-two years after *Battle-Pieces,* and only three years before Melville's death, came *John Marr and other Sailors with some Sea-Pieces.* A curious prefatory note excuses the profane language of sailors by saying that it is essentially without profane purpose; ethically viewed, he says, it is but a percussion of the air and ignored, no doubt, by a bland Recording Angel. A pleasant association is touched by the inscription of the volume to an English novelist of the sea, W. Clark

Russell, who had opened a correspondence with Melville by a warm tribute to *Moby-Dick*; the inscription of *John Marr* containing an equally cordial avowal that *The Wreck of the Grosvenor* entitled Russell to the naval crown in current literature. Grateful are these compliments between men of letters!

The poem takes its title from the name of an old seaman who, owing to a crippling wound, settles down on a frontier prairie, marries, buries his wife and infant child, and lives thereafter in enforced isolation from his few neighbours; thus it is that, as explained in a prose introduction, he communes visionarily with old shipmates, and these reveries form the subject of the poems. Some hint there is here, perhaps, of the reverted gaze of Melville himself as years gathered shadowing around him. Where are the old familiars? Where is Ap Catesby and Guert Gan, and the crabbed Lieutenant Don Lumbago, and one and another?

Where's Commander All-a-Tanto?
Where's Orlop Bob singing up from below?
Where's Rhyming Ned? has he spun his last canto?
Where's Jewsharp Jim? Where's Rigadoon Joe?
Ah, for the music over and done,
The band all dismissed save the droned trombone! . . .

Wife, where be all these blades, I wonder,
Pennoned fine fellows, so strong, so gay?
Never their colours with a dip dived under:
Have they hauled them down in a lack-lustre day,
Or beached their boats in the Far, Far Away?

In these easy, lapping, wave-like lines, unpolished and needing no polish, Melville has captured something truly and utterly poetic, which was to be given a

remarkably similar expression in Mr. Hardy's early lines:

> William Dewy, Tranter Reuben, Farmer Ledlow late at plough,
> Robert's kin, and John's, and Ned's,
> And the Squire, and Lady Susan, lie in Mellstock churchyard now!

Another poem speaks in the name of an old petty officer who lay dying in his hammock, and hearing familiar names and phrases, babbles of them to the tune of *Farewell and Adieu to you Ladies of Spain*; and here again the poignancy of all such reminiscence is preserved in the verses to that beautiful old air. Where he is more formal, and where he leaves the past, he is colder and duller; he drops into description and becomes merely conventional, both in attitude and phrasing; reminding us, as many better poets have done, how rare is fine sea-poetry. Only the last quatrain of the volume touches his own best, and that is because of its direct expression and severe confinement:

> Healed of my hurt, I laud the inhuman Sea—
> Yea, bless the Angels Four that there convene;
> For healed I am even by their pitiless breath
> Distilled in wholesome dew named rosmarine.

Timoleon, the third volume, dedicated to Elihu Vedder, was published in a privately printed edition of twenty-five copies in the year of Melville's death. It collects many travel pictures of Greece and Italy: Pisa's Leaning Tower that hovers, shivering, a would-be suicide; the confessional in a church at Padua:

Dread diving-bell! In thee inurned
What hollows the priest must sound,
Descending into consciences
Where more is hid than found.

The poems in *Timoleon* are Melville's lightest and sunniest; sometimes he is almost happy in the sight of the brilliant unfamiliar world of the past, and once or twice his lyrics are pure, thoughtless, lovely. And one piece is so much apart from the rest, suggesting experiences nowhere else hinted at in all his work, that it seems at first doubtful whether the lines should be accepted as a testimony of himself, or simply as a fanciful, unusual playing with an idea. "After the Pleasure Party" is the title, and the sting of sex is the subject. The verse is not very perfect, but he speaks directly of the "drear shame" when sex asserts itself, and bitterly when he asks:

And kept I long heaven's watch for this,
Contemning love, for this, even this?

Why, Nature, has thou made us but in halves—co-relatives? This makes slaves of us:

If these co-relatives never meet
Selfhood itself seems incomplete.
And such the dicing of blind fate
Few matching halves here meet and mate.

This sexual feud! he exclaims; and again, "disillusion opens all the shore". If Melville is speaking of himself, in a sudden outburst of unmitigated and terrible sincerity, he is speaking as he spoke nowhere else in all his work. The poem is too brief to endure a superstructure of theory, but it is blindingly bright,

and reveals, once for all, his common humanity and subdual to the common mystery of flesh and spirit. It is perhaps significant that "After the Pleasure Party" should be among the last of the poems brought together in his lifetime, and should hint at what he had all his life been sternly repressing.

Apart from the three volumes named, and the long narrative *Clarel,* at which we shall be looking in a moment, there are about eighty short poems unpublished in Melville's lifetime, and only lately printed by Professor Weaver in the collected poems. The first section of these, "Weeds and Wildings", is dedicated to his wife in a beautiful prose reminiscence, matched by occasional verses that seem but as fragments of an unseen beauty. Age, dull tranquillizer as he calls it in the last poem of this group, has not soddened his nerves; many of the verses are slight and light, as though a less adroit Landor—that unageing lyrist of eighty—had looked from a wintry America to summer and Italy. Following this group of verses comes "At the Hostelry", and then "Naples in the Time of Bomba"—two curiously Browning-like exercises, simpler than Browning in phrase, but no less picturesque and careless in movement, whether rhymed or unrhymed verse is used, and at bottom as simple and unvexed as Browning essentially is.

But it is when he turns into himself again and becomes purely lyrical, beautifully liquid, that Melville's verse—kept by him from the world's eyes —becomes significant. There are certain of these that must yet take their conspicuous place among nineteenth-century lyrics, however small that survival

be. Melville's was not the gift of the sudden unforgettable phrase, the Shakespearean line of marvellous gleaming light, but he has the gift of suffusing a whole lyric with a light that comes from within himself:

GOLD IN THE MOUNTAIN

Gold in the mountain,
And gold in the glen,
And greed in the heart,
Heaven having no part,
And unsatisfied men.

There is another beginning "In shards the sylvan vases lie", and most memorable of all there is "Immolated", in which he pleads that no reproach fall because, scarce yielding to a reckless mood but jealous of the future of these neglected poems—

I sealed you in a fate subdued.
Have I not saved you from the dread
Theft, and ignoring which need be
The triumph of the insincere
Unanimous Mediocrity?
Rest therefore, free from all despite,
Snugged in the arms of comfortable night.

That "night" is now broken, and, regret the long suppression as we may, we still have cause to be thankful and admire the poems which Melville could not bring himself to stale by exposure and neglect.

The final poem of the hitherto unpublished verses is "The Lake", slightly Wordsworthian in feeling and hope, slower and subtler in rhythm than Melville is elsewhere, and expressing that old incomprehensibility of death swallowing up life and life succeeding death for ever. The verse has a grave, musing dignity,

and none of Melville's poetry could have been found more fit to conclude this elusive collection.

Clarel, a Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land, had never been published in England until the collection of Melville's work embraced it in 1924. The author was content, he said, with whatever future awaited *Clarel,* but contentment might be strained if he were alive now, for what has befallen this enormous poem is—nothing, and silence. It has few of the best qualities of the remainder, and it has in an exaggerated degree the worst quality—its fluency. Descriptive verse is no longer in vogue, and the cinema has usurped whatever place it retained until the twentieth century; and it is scarcely too much to say that, as to a large part of *Clarel's* purpose, it is fulfilled more admirably by the cinema. Melville's pilgrimage is precisely recorded, his itinerary might be set forth log-wise from the verse, and this dull precision perhaps accounts in part for the "boring" power of the poem. "Facile chat" is one of his own phrases, and indeed the chat when it is philosophic becomes so facile that you wish for description; and then the description proves so facile that you plead for philosophy, or your thoughts wander idly from the page. Yet Melville cannot escape his gifts, even in octosyllabic verse of many thousand lines: witness the following opening to "The Site of the Passion":

> And wherefore by the convents be
> Gardens? Ascetics roses twine?
> Nay, but there is a memory.
> Within a garden walking see
> The angered God. And where the vine

> And olive in the darkling hours
> Inweave green sepulchres of bowers—
> Who, to defend us from despair,
> Pale undergoes the Passion there
> In solitude? Yes, memory
> Links Eden and Gethsemane.

Once or twice the drowsy fetters of the verse are broken and a pure lyric note is breathed in another measure, and finer than all else is the dirge sung by Clarel, bereaved lover of a simple Ruth—not perfect in phrase, but so near perfect that the tenderness is scarcely flawed by the flaws.

How long Melville spent in a reminiscent caressing of his theme I do not know; there are signs of care but not of labour, and there are introductory passages —one is an avowed ambling in the steps of Chaucer's pilgrims—which show how thoughtfully the poem was planned. A great deal of his own meditative mind is poured into the poem and intervolved with everybody's musings upon grave matters; and if the verse had really recorded a double journey, through the Holy Land and through philosophic and religious ideas, it might not have been harder to read, but it would certainly have been more valuable. What makes it so curious, however, and its implied "argument" so irresolute, is the way in which one person after another drifts into the company, talks and is talked about for pages, and then disappears, leaving Clarel himself and his fatal love almost the only constant elements in an inconstant and sorry scheme. It would be foolish to stress the faults, yet they cannot be ignored since Melville indulged himself so luxuriously in them. Here, for instance, are a few lines

from many concerning a Lebanon guide, a rumoured Emir's son:

> Here his dress to mark:
> A simple woollen cloak, with dark
> Vertical stripes; a vest to suit;
> White turban like snow-wreath; a boot
> Exempt from spur; a sash of fair
> White linen, long-fringed at the ends . . .

and so on, even with the horses and their caparison. It is a merely characteristic passage, written, one might fear, in luckless emulation of the nineteenth-century habit of narrative poeticising, and in manner suggesting a pious Byron or a travelled and garrulous Wordsworth. Nor is it merely externals that are thus obstinately laboured: ideas as well, and endless arguments on creeds and disciples, are beaten out to a thinness which conceals not even the shadow of poetry; thus a visit to Bethlehem is preluded by a weary vain discussion of unchristian christian peoples, in phrases that linger vexingly even when you read on the next page of—

> The Manger in its low remove
> Where lay, a thousand years before,
> The Child of awful worshipping,
> Destined to prove all slights and scorns,
> And a God's coronation—thorns.

And often, too often, the discussion takes on the sad colours of dissent and division, and even the Epilogue is choked with phrases of *faith v. evolution*: "science the feud can only aggravate"—the feud between ape and angel.

When Melville wrote *Clarel* he tried to recover the

sensations of his journey and relate his personal faith to all that he had seen. There is less of imagination in *Clarel* than in any other of his verse, and he proved —perhaps to himself, bitterest of proof!—that in vain is memory stimulated if imagination sleeps heavily on and will not be roused; nor can ideas, ethical or religious ideas, vitalize a poem if imagination is fled. He never learned, neither in verse nor in prose, that his philosophy and religion, his transcendentalism and piety, are of little *essential* value in poetry, and indeed of none if by their presence they exclude imagination.

CHAPTER X

ELEMENTS OF STYLE—CONCLUSION

SUFFICIENT has been shown of the merits of Melville's prose to justify a little closer attention to the elements of his style; and since for this purpose it is convenient to look at the best only, and mark its distinctive qualities, the passage chiefly to be noted will be taken from *Moby-Dick*.

Melville began by being a writer of simple direct prose, reminding one partly of Defoe and partly of Borrow, and he became a writer of eloquent elaborated prose wantoning in its strength and movement as his whales wanton in water. Something was due to his reading, to his admiration of Sir Thomas Browne, for example; just as that trick of rapidly repeated apostrophe which is found in *Moby-Dick* among other books is pretty clearly caught from Rabelais and Urquhart. He was not an irregular innovating genius who overthrows idols and breaks up a language in order to build and make anew: he used the things he loved, for they possessed his mind. But he was able to use them because of his own genius, and one of the chief gifts of that genius was his ear for rhythm. Melville adheres to that superb tradition of English

writers—the tradition of prose written for the ear rather than the eye. The nineteenth century saw the growth and perhaps temporary triumph of a new tradition—that of prose written for the eye; pictorial prose such as Carlyle used with unexampled energy and Dickens with restless curiosity, and which slowly won upon writers in spite of Newman and Ruskin. There was a brief embarrassment when Pater delicately reconciled the two traditions, but the pictorial emerged and culminated in the studious brilliance of Stevenson; and now, I suppose, it lies exhausted with conquest, while the rhythmic tradition revives and permits us to understand with our ears more than with our eyes. Hence it is that Melville's practice has a present importance.

He depended, for his impression on his reader, less upon picture than upon music, and his chief influence over our minds is felt, not when he is presenting something for us to see, but when he is vibrating with rhythms that stimulate our feelings. His appeal is emotional; his own imagination awakes him to an emotional response, and he writes as one who composes by playing music, seeking to match the unheard melody by rhythms that shall prolong and repeat the author's apprehension of the inward air. Vivid epithet and swift succession of comparison and image would not achieve his purpose, as he grew in consciousness of it and of his own capacity. In an early book such as *Typee* the excellencies are almost independent of the style, and even when he is strongly moved he writes tamely and tritely.

They fold to their bosoms the vipers whose sting is destined to poison all their joys; and the instinctive

feeling of love within their breasts is soon converted into the bitterest hate. The enormities perpetrated in the South Seas upon some of the inoffensive islanders well-nigh pass belief. These things are seldom proclaimed at home; they happen at the very ends of the earth; they are done in a corner, and there are none to reveal them. But there is, nevertheless, many a petty trader that has navigated the Pacific whose course from island to island might be traced by a series of cold-blooded robberies, kidnappings, and murders, the iniquity of which might be considered almost sufficient to sink her guilty timbers to the bottom of the sea.—*Typee,* ch. iv. (1st ed.).

The inadequacy of this to the indignation of the author scarcely needs notice—smooth familiar image, conventional phrase, and so on.

Melville's speedy growth in literary grace can be marked by comparing this with almost any passage from *Redburn*—part of that describing the glass ship that fascinated his childish imagination.

The name of this curious ship was *La Reine,* or "The Queen", which was painted on her stern where any one might read it, among a crowd of glass dolphins and sea-horses carved there in a sort of semicircle. And this queen rode undisputed mistress of a green glassy sea, some of whose waves were breaking over her bows in a wild way, I can tell you, and I used to be giving her up for lost and foundered every moment, till I grew older, and perceived that she was not in the slightest danger in the world.—*Redburn* (ch. i.).

Here he is describing something his childhood was familiar with, and he presents it through his own sensations; it might have been photography, but it is

music with music's simple awakening power. Time has taught him. The example might be more forcible if taken from *Mardi,* in which the prose is more consciously and more cunningly developed. An extreme of contrast is heard in this uplifted speech.

> Churned in foam, that outer ocean lashed the clouds; and straight in my white wake, headlong dashed a shallop, three fixed spectres leaning o'er its prow: three arrows poising. And thus, pursuers and pursued flew on, over an endless sea.—*Mardi* (conclusion).

Here is shown in brief Melville's characteristic manner, in his use of alliteration and suspension of clauses. "Three arrows poising" exactly expresses, in tense and sound, the imminence of fate from which Taji flew. The passage is vivid enough in picture, but its value in sound and suggestion of hunted speed is greater.

From this to *Moby-Dick,* now, is a quick passage.

> When gliding by the Bashee isles we emerged at last upon the great South Sea; were it not for other things, I could have greeted my dear Pacific with uncounted thanks, for now the long supplication of my youth was answered; that serene ocean rolled eastward from me a thousand leagues of blue.
>
> There is, one knows not what sweet mystery about this sea, whose gently awful stirrings seem to speak of some hidden soul beneath; like those fabled undulations of the Ephesian sod over the buried Evangelist St. John. And meet it is, that over these sea-pastures, wide-rolling watery prairies and Potters' Fields of all four continents, the waves should rise and fall, and ebb and flow unceasingly; for here, millions of mixed shades and shadows, drowned

dreams, somnambulisms, reveries; all that we call lives and souls, lie dreaming, dreaming, still; tossing like slumberers in their beds; the ever-rolling waves but made so by their restlessness.

To any meditative Magian rover, this serene Pacific, once beheld, must ever after be the sea of his adoption. It rolls the midmost waters of the world, the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic being but its arms. The same waves wash the moles of the new-built Californian towns, but yesterday planted by the recentest race of men, lave the faded but still gorgeous skirts of Asiatic lands, older than Abraham; while all between float milky-ways of coral isles, and low-lying, endless, unknown archipelagos, and impenetrable Japans. Thus this mysterious, divine Pacific zones the world's whole bulk about; makes all coasts one bay to it; seems the tide-beating heart of earth. Lifted by those eternal swells, you needs must own the seductive god, bowing your head to Pan.

The first of these sentences is sufficient illustration of Melville's delicate uncomplicated structure and rhythm. The three simple clauses are perfectly balanced, the fuller wave of the second rising deliberately in "my dear Pacific with uncounted thanks", and immediately beginning its fall with "for now the long supplication". There is no conspicuous alliteration, nor flashing epithet, and "supplication" is the most unfamiliar of all the words in the sentence; and the only emphasis is in the strong conclusion of the first clause—"the great South Sea". All the beauty is in the order and rhythm. A glance at the second paragraph will yield similar evidence, especially in "like those fabled undulations of the Ephesian sod over the buried Evangelist St.

John". The rhythm is distinct with the introduction of "fabled undulations" and the repeated labials, and again marked by the alliteration, distant or near, in "over the buried Evangelist St. John"; while the unique phrase "Ephesian sod" startles the ear with felicity. Clear again in the next sentence is the rhythmic basis denominated by "that over these sea-pastures, wide-rolling watery prairies and Potters' Fields of all four continents"; it gives the long-breathed sea-like movement that is most characteristic of Melville's best prose, and sets the tone that is needed to knit into harmony the airs and images of the rest of the sentence.

The effect of these sentences is cumulative, and in the third paragraph the inward vision is enlarged to the apprehension of the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic as mere arms of the vast Pacific; and following this comes the greatest sentence of all, itself like an ocean in little as it gathers up the sense and sound of the rest. The first clause consists of three subordinates (like the main clause of the first sentence), and when it has enlarged slowly with the magnificence of "lave the faded but still gorgeous skirts of Asiatic lands, older than Abraham", so subtle in assonance and repetition, it falls with an equally beautiful vowel music into the noble close of "impenetrable Japans". Something is contributed to these paragraphs by the compound words that Melville loved, something by those Biblical phrases or references with which his soul was saturated, something by a possible dual meaning in "moles" and "new-built", the cities being upheaved as swiftly as the mounds of the night-labouring mole; but most of all by the wave-like motion, on which the reader is

borne into a serene acceptance and understanding. The rhythm is definite but not fixed, and is unlike any rhythm of verse; but, like verse, the prose that moves thus easily, as the blood through the veins, is enlarged and enriched in its meaning by the form it wears. The words become more than the words, the meaning is increased by suggestion and the excitement of the mind at the touch of so much beauty, and apprehensions come in crowds, all quickening and intensifying as they come. The reader's emotion and intelligence co-operate at last with the writer's.

This is the office and privilege of the highest prose. It need not be suggested—for that would be foolish—that Melville wrought consciously to effect all that analysis might reveal; the unconscious mind, stealing silently between the eyes and the pen, suggests, offers, presses and overwhelms the conscious mind, and makes it less an equal than a servant. This is the character of genius, that what is unconscious and infinite intercepts the hand of the conscious, and writes in its own unaccountable way out of another vision and another energy than the author is clearly aware of.

Nor can it be maintained that Melville wrote consistently with the same happy sureness, or even throughout a single book. There is more of this perfection in *Moby-Dick* than elsewhere, but there is something of it in several of the books—in *Mardi* and *Pierre*; and it is because this perfection is not casual but truly characteristic that he must be called a great prose writer. Too often he is at the mercy of a bad genius, who tempts him to use all his gifts save one—restraint; and thus his lavish latinisms, his fond compound words, his Biblical allusions, his large

metaphors and easy movements—all may be used, but restraint is lacking and the result is ornate, or heavy, or slow, or extravagant, and merely unreadable. His very virtues need support from the withheld Virtue, but given that support all his great powers of mind are fused into beauty of speech; and the marvels of *Moby-Dick* leap out on almost every page, or the posthumous *Billy Budd* yields such phrases as are quoted on another page, beginning (with characteristic fondness) "Syllables so unanticipated". To admit that Melville did not always write greatly is easy, but it must be acknowledged first that he was nevertheless among the greatest of modern imaginative writers of prose.[1]

[1] In *A History of English Prose Rhythm* Mr. Saintsbury applied methods of scansion to an infinite variety of prose, but was forced to ignore American masters. His methods might have been touched to a new and fine issue had he been able to note the best of Melville, whose work would fall under his third division. "Fully but strictly rhythmical prose". Mr. Saintsbury explains that the scansion of this order of prose is arranged on a principle totally different from that governing the scansion of verse. "Instead of sameness, equivalence, and recurrence, the central idea turns on difference, inequality, and variety. And though a certain amount of correspondence is introduced by the necessary presence of the identical quantity-combinations called *feet*, these are to be so arranged that they will not constitute *metre*. Fragments of different metres—melted or welded rather than dovetailed or mosaicked into the whole—can hardly be avoided, and indeed will positively improve it [?]; but if they emerge and 'stick out,' it is doomed. Its great law is that every syllable shall, as in poetry, have recognizable rhythmical value, and be capable of entering into rhythmical transactions with its neighbours, but that these transactions shall always stop short, or steer clear, of admitting the recurrent combinations proper to metre." The quality and mode of Melville's best work in prose could hardly be more exactly defined, and the fact that Mr. Saintsbury is writing this of Landor and De Quincey, with Thackeray, Ruskin, Pater and

To RESUME all that has been said in the previous chapters and present our subject in a single consistent portrait would be moderately easy but for Melville's suppressions, of which any reader must be aware in the course of surveying all these books. What Melville wilfully concealed from our eyes may, if we are lucky, be brought to light; but it is not easy to bring to light the things he sought to conceal from his own eyes, or even to determine very precisely the nature and extent of his concealments. An imaginative writer who has touched the responsive imagination of the world may not claim, I suppose, the indulgence of privacy, especially when so much of what is precious in his work is distilled through a unique personality. That which is pure genius must needs be purely unique, and in Melville's case it is not possible to consider his genius in isolation or to read his work truly without seeking to read his mind; and though the suppressions tease us, even when they are made for his own secret sake, they cannot be allowed to put us off.

Julian Hawthorne's suggestion, after seeing Melville seven years before the latter's death, that there were secret passages in his history, and that Melville therefore assumed secrets to exist in Nathaniel Hawthorne's heart, is acute and valuable as coming from one of the few who have related an impression of personal contact. But he does not help us to ascertain what Melville

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Newman approaching, is an indication of the cis-Atlantic prose-masters with whom Melville is naturally to be ranked. And there is a splendid gratification, for an English reader, in the fact that one of the greatest of American prose writers should be so surely linked to the native traditions of the older country.

was suppressing, and I do not think it adequate to say that he was merely hiding his disappointment at the failure of fame, and renouncing his gifts because they were no longer recognized. That much was renounced is clear, but the reason of the renunciation was not petty or wholly personal. The lack of faith, the desire of fresh captaincy in a voyage hitherto vexed with illusions, this that Nathaniel Hawthorne had detected in his old intimate is a much more probable reason. If Melville doubted, he never told his doubts: at a time when others were exuberantly agnostic, and rainy hopes were eloquently sung by many of the poets, Melville was silent. His questions were uttered in character, and were shaken off by his imagination. The austerity, or the bleakness, of early puritanic influences still kept a cold stern touch on his temper, and made him mute upon those questionings which he could not wholly quench. In one of his vehement letters to Hawthorne he wrote, "I stand for the heart. To the dogs with the head!" but he did not, for all that, deny his own thought but went on, strangely, "The reason the mass of men fear God, and *at bottom dislike* Him, is because they rather distrust His heart, and fancy Him all brain like a watch. (You perceive I employ a capital initial in the pronoun referring to the Deity; don't you think there is a slight dash of flunkeyism in that usage?)" Here his reason speaks, but he did not live by reason alone. If the mass of men feared God because they distrusted Him, Melville was unlike the mass of men; he did not fear, and all his misgiving was because he did not *see*.

Isolation, the friendlessness of man, the failure to see God, the growing sense, too, that contact with

men was an embarrassment more than a refreshment—by these he was driven inwards and fingered in silence the problems that beset him. And more than all, a singular perversity grew in him, until he came to sharpen deliberately the isolation and intensify the silence. His genius was shrouded, and in New York he went about as though it was now a dead thing, or had never been born. He refrained from the company of those he might have dominated, and he banished the world that had forgotten him. I think he suffered from this complete renunciation, but bitterness did not flourish in his mind, and as age drew on and his early successes and disappointment receded, a mildness came into his soul. Melville's was naturally a religious mind, and though he praises Hawthorne for uttering an everlasting *No!* he does not echo it. His poems rise and fall with the serenity of a wise, experienced being, and his last story is a blessed reconciliation.

But there was one supreme suppression of which he says nothing, except in a single brief poem quoted a little while ago. Part of Melville's character, as I have suggested, is to be read in what he wrote, but another part in what he refrained from. No one can read his work extensively without noticing the almost complete absence of women and his almost complete silence about sex. A cold nature his assuredly was not, and passages in *Pierre* have a power so unholy that one reads shrinkingly. But excepting *Pierre* and one or two of the lesser books, and also *Clarel* among the poems, there is scarce a hint that Melville was aware of what it is that teases, exalts, ennobles and destroys men. The sharpest sexual passion anywhere in his work, and it is an all but solitary instance, is

incestuous. Was it perhaps the upgathered impulses of his puritanic heritage that warred with his natural passion and made out of that strife a silence, a desolation? Of all modern imaginative writers Melville is the least obviously troubled by the struggle that Blake seraphically viewed as a part and an image of spiritual life. Here, indeed, the analogy between Blake and Melville suddenly fails. For Blake, as for other mystics, the sexual strife was a rehearsal of the unending vaster conflict between the forces of man and God, Time and Eternity; but Melville saw it as something only to be annulled. Save for the abundance of masculine passion expressed in other books and other ways, and the normality revealed in nearly all of them, it might have seemed that he was deficient in humanity; but against this all his writing, and all his life so far as it is recorded, is clear evidence.

It is indeed a singular character, thus viewed in its suppressions. Melville is like nobody else, and perhaps if any verdict of posterity could give him pleasure it would be simply that. Sunken in the mass of common men for several impressionable years, he emerged into sudden fame, and discovered himself only to subdue himself before any one had time to mark him well. But in matters a little less intimate it is possible to read his mind easily enough. Thus he is boldly unashamed of not being European; he is proud to be American, and urges his contemporaries against the mimicry of another continent and race. I said just now that he was like nobody else; and he wanted Americans to be like nobody else, but to be *Americans*. He could not content himself with being somebody's dog, and hated the thought of America being some-

body's dog, to run to any whistle of another tradition or culture.

And again, like any proud, independent man living inwards he shows, as was said earlier, a democratic sympathy but an autocratic will. The sympathy was the spell of his time, the will was the expression of his own personality. All his work tends to the exaltation of individual figures—Ahab and his mates, King Media, Jack Chase the incomparable, Jackson the evil-liver; and their autocratic wills are unquestioned. Democracy cannot live in their presence. Melville preserves the traditional attitude of his ancestors, in which the individual soul and God are all, and the crowds of men are as nothing.

It is a simpler question when we ask what he gave us in his work, as distinct from the enigma of his personality. The foregoing chapters present his qualities without relating them to one another, and it is necessary to consider what in sum and action they amount to. His gift of lucid, easy narrative, his early adherence to faithful description, his use of rich resources of experience, his strangely modern psychology, his delightful skill in portraiture, his volubility in dialogue—these excellencies have been noted; and against these must be set his comparative failure in invention, his disdain of a particular range of emotions the most urgent if not the most powerful of all, his extravagance and his unresisted tendency to philosophize. But to pursue this ledger method does not help us, and it leaves unnoticed Melville's grand faculty, the faculty which stations him uniquely among modern imaginative writers. He was a myth-maker, a

creator, a poet in the essential meaning of the word, and all his best powers were fused in one vital imagination, *Moby-Dick*. It is as purely a creation as *Paradise Lost,* born of the same mythopoetic faculty, and making of the myth, in the old heroic way, a parable as well. This *making* power is the supreme power in the imaginative arts. Shakespeare is not more boldly distinguished from the intellectuals, from Jonson onwards, than Melville from the analysts and psychologists that followed him. He was capable of the darkest and deepest analytic psychology, as *Pierre* showed, but he was more splendidly endowed with the energy of creation. It was a gift with spiritual affiliations, not always found among imaginative writers, in the strength of which he could look at heaven and earth and the heart of man and behold everything in an eternal light, as a conflict between infinite and irreconcilable desires. He was a poet in whose vision the world existed as imagination, and existed thus more vividly than in the common sensuous apprehension.

Turning to the possible classification of his work in the old way, it is clear that Melville followed the full romantic tradition. He disdained every curbing and extravagated with absolute wilfulness, being tempted by the richness and wildness of life rather than by its order and discipline. He brooded upon a vast, lava-like grandeur, still smoking heat, with passion and sorrow hanging huge above, cloud-like; and for all his wide difference in theme he is as romantic as Scott and Dickens in England, or Poe and Hawthorne in America. His chief failure, *Pierre,* shows his allegiance as plainly as his chief success; and

failure, indeed, is often as eloquent as success in explaining a writer's qualities. Melville is as unlike any classic, architectural writer as Emily Brontë is unlike Jane Austen. Irregularity and vehemence allure him; they are as weapons used to affront the forbidding mysteries of the heart of man and the ways of God; they are the natural expression of his aspiring, sombre spirit.

A man of this special genius may be distinguished among many distinguished writers—but not in their eyes. Melville himself showed an indolent indifference to the intellectual movement of his time, as regards American and English writers alike. He praises Hawthorne nobly, damns Washington Irving and ignores the rest; as though he would suppress not only his own genius but also that of his contemporaries. Of Poe and Whitman and Lowell and Emerson and Thoreau he says almost nothing. And of his English contemporaries he says nothing—nothing of Dickens, whose strictures upon American manners and politics were still stinging his hosts long after his return to England, nothing of any English novelist or poet. Melville read much, but he seems to have interdicted all commerce with the writers of his time—a part, I suppose, of his perverse renunciation. He retreated into the shadowiness of his own visions—not as a wounded bird creeps into the hedge, but as a noble lion that pads hushing back into his cave and there lies idle, lonely, majestic.

The contemporaries that he ignored, neglected him. Melville was like one, in his own eyes,

> Whom the time's scorn has saved from its respect,

and there was indeed little respect spared for him even when he died. The obituary notices, mostly the work of one or two loyal hands (Arthur Stedman's was among them), were devoted to reviving Melville before he could be buried under a due tribute. Something, it was felt, was due to the dead, but first it must be explained *who* was dead. He had lived to seventy-two, and his contemporaries that survived maintained the old silence. His brief intimacy with Hawthorne yields us precious fruit, but it is a solitary instance. Lowell, Whitman and Melville were each born in 1819, and each died within about a year of the others. To Emerson, Thoreau and Mark Twain, again, one might ignorantly look for some recognition of Melville's eminence, but a cloud removed him from their sight and they were dumb. At the time of his death he was as serenely isolated in public indifference or ignorance as our English Titan, Mr. C. M. Doughty, at the time of the present writing, or as America's most singular lyrical poet, Emily Dickinson, until a year or two ago.

It is the more conspicuous when we reflect upon the silent adjustment by Time of the honour and esteem awarded to Herman Melville and his contemporaries. Melville's best work in prose was confined, with two exceptions, to the short period between 1846 and 1852. Death removed his chief native contemporary, Poe, in 1849, and made a comparison impossible, for most of Poe's work was done before Melville had written a single book. In this small space of years Hawthorne published *Mosses from an Old Manse, The Scarlet Letter, The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance*; Thoreau published *A Week*

on the Concord; Emerson's star-like Essays began to appear; but Whitman's true work falls outside the period, while nothing at all of importance came from Lowell. Of all these not one has gained so much from Time's sifting as Melville. And if the comparison is made with English writers it is possible to speak very much to the same effect. Fashions in literary appreciation are as uncertain as other fashions, but the revaluation that is slowly completed long after an author's eclipse is seldom a mere caprice. When Melville died in 1891 no one recalled the fact that *Moby-Dick* came between *Pendennis* and *Esmond*, and between *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House*; that *Mardi* had been published within a few months of *Vanity Fair*, and *Omoo* within a few months of *Wuthering Heights*. As the light of a star may be many years in its passage to the earth, so Melville's work needed more than half a century to reveal its full lustre in the great age of the novel. No one will pretend that his secondary novels, such as *Omoo*, exceed in brightness the tragic blaze of Emily Brontë, nor that even *Moby-Dick* outshines the contemporary work of Dickens; and it is sufficient to say that Melville did supremely what no one of his age was doing at all, and that it is by virtue of *difference*, not by virtue of likeness, that his greatness in any contemporary company is assured. If we include in this glance those that wrote a little later, Reade and George Eliot, Kingsley, Wilkie Collins and Trollope, the solitary excellence of Herman Melville is not less conspicuous. The judgement of 1926 upon the work of, say, 1845 to 1865 is at least disinterested, and unvexed by the personal afterglow which makes prompt critical assessment so tempting

and so fallacious; and the modern restationing of two of these writers, Anthony Trollope and Herman Melville, is a blessed instance of the subtle revolution which at length redresses all inequity. Little audacity, indeed, is wanted to repeat now, in concluding, the assertion with which this volume opened, that Melville is the most powerful of all the great American writers.

It is, nevertheless, not quite easy to see his work, or himself in his work, except in an image and at a little distance. The needed image is the simplest—that of a mountain or shape of mountain-like proportions, rising from a confused plain into confused cloud; a dark irregular formation with deep forests and falling waters and chasms that seem like mere defeats of creation; facing the east an abundance of green pasture, and to the west a wild mystery of incumbent shape and shadow. At times the head is obscure, at times clear, according as you look through glasses or without them, and see the mountain simply or with perverse prepossessions. The great mass is lonely and silent, as all places of natural growth or upheaval; it is heaved out of American soil, sustained by and in turn sustaining native resources. The brightness is never delusive, for in Melville's youthful, impetuous books, such as *Typee* and *Redburn,* there is no more than there seems, and symbols have not yet seduced him; but the western shadows are strange, and the forest growth of *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre* is painful, haunted and unholy. The remote grandeur of the mountain head was once invisible, but to-day it is clear, for time has passed and questions have yielded their own answers. In 1921

—thirty years after Melville's death—Professor Raymond Weaver first surveyed the mountain, and now in 1926 the present light railway is opened, and offers a humble passage about the ravined, irregular rock.

APPENDIX

"MOCHA DICK"

THE confirmation by Mr. Hawes in his book *Whaling* (1924) of Melville's extraordinary stories of whales is amplified by an anonymous article in *The Detroit Free Press* a few months after Melville's death.

"Between the years 1840 and 1859 the whaling vessels of such nations as pursued the leviathan of the deep for his commercial value encountered no less than five whales who became famous as terrors of the sea. They were 'Mocha Dick', 'Spotted Tom', 'Shy Jack', 'Ugly Tom', and 'Fighting Joe'. These names were of course given them by the sailors, but they came to be known to whalers of all nations. You may think it curious that one whale could be identified from another of the same size and species, but it was no more difficult than to identify one particular horse in a drove of several hundred. In other words, each leviathan has some peculiar mark or characteristic of his own, and if sighted two or three times can be identified for ever afterward.

" 'Mocha Dick' headed the list of terrors from the start, and kept his place for nineteen long years. No whale was so fiercely hunted, and none ever created so much damage among the hunters. What I am going to tell you is partly a matter of published record in England, Scotland and America, and was partly gleaned from Nantucket and

New Bedford whalers who battled with the cachalot time after time, to suffer defeat on each occasion.

"On the 5th day of July, 1840, the English whaling brig 'Desmond', being then 215 miles due west of the port of Valparaiso, Chili, sighted a lone whale which breached his full length above the surface about two miles away. The boats were lowered, but before they were within half a mile of the whale he slued around head on to them and advanced to meet them. He struck one boat with his head, and drove her under stern first and then chewed her up. He then sounded and was lost to sight for fifteen minutes. When he came up it was to lift the other boat thirty feet high on his head, and of course she was completely shattered. Oars and planks were ground fine by his teeth as he wallowed about, and two men were drowned before the whale finally went slowly off to the north. This was 'Mocha Dick's' introduction to the blubber hunters. He was the largest whale any one aboard the brig had ever seen, and across his head was a scar about eight feet long, which showed almost white on the grey-black background. It was by this scar he was ever afterward identified.

"The next craft to encounter 'Mocha Dick' was the Russian bark 'Sarepta'. This was on the 30th of August, almost two months later, and she was fully 500 miles to the south of the spot where he was first seen. She lowered two boats for a lone whale and killed him. The bark was three miles away, and beating down to the whale under a light breeze, when 'Mocha Dick' suddenly shot out of the water between the vessel and the boats. Such was his impetus that nearly his full length could be traced before he fell with a crash that could have been heard for miles around. As soon as he had righted himself he made straight for the boats. One of them passed around the dead whale before he got up, but the other was caught by

the sweep of his jaw as he came on and was knocked to pieces. He then took up his position beside the dead whale and remained quiet for half an hour, during which interval the other boat pulled off to the bark.

"Three men had been lost, and a fourth had both arms broken, while the sailors had been given such a fright that they could not be induced to attack. The vessel hung about the spot for three hours, hoping the fierce leviathan would take himself off, but finally had to sail away and leave him in possession. The dead whale was taken possession of two days later by the whaling ship 'John Bruce', of Nantucket, but it was no longer guarded.

"The next authentic record of 'Mocha Dick' was furnished by the Bristol whaler 'John Day' in May of the year following. She was then to the east of the Falkland Islands, and was trying out blubber as she drifted with a light breeze. At two o'clock in the afternoon a gigantic whale breached within 300 feet of her, shooting his full length out of water, and raising such a sea by his fall that the ship rolled as if in a gale. The whale then swam slowly about, and as soon as the men caught sight of his head they identified him as 'Mocha Dick'. His actions were menacing, but the captain at once decided to attack him. Three boats were lowered, and as the whale made off to windward the first mate put a harpoon into him. This was the first iron 'Mocha Dick' had ever felt. He sounded at once and ran for three miles, and when he came up it was to slue around and head for the boat. His action was so unexpected and his speed so great, that he caught the boat unprepared and ran right over it.

"As it went under he stopped short and turned as on a pivot, beating the water all the time with flukes which measured twenty-four feet across. Nothing was left of the boat but splinters, and two of her crew were killed or drowned. The other two boats advanced to the attack,

but before they were near enough to dart the whale settled away like a lump of lead. One of the boats got hold of the floating line, but had scarcely secured it when the tricky fighter came up under the other and sent it skyward with the bottom knocked out. He then pivoted and thrashed the surface as before, and another man was lost and two others severely injured.

"The crew had had enough of 'Mocha Dick', and while he hauled off and lay waiting for another attack the remaining boat was hauled up and the ship sneaked away. The English captain had vowed that if he ever encountered that whale he would kill him or lose his whole outfit of men and boats, but an hour's fighting had satisfied him that he had undertaken too big a job.

"The particulars of the several encounters recorded above were soon known to all whalers. Some captains decided to let 'Mocha Dick' severely alone, while others were ambitious to secure the credit of killing him. However, he disappeared after the fight with the 'John Day', and was not seen again for seventeen months. It had come to be generally believed that he had died of old age or had been killed in a fight with another whale, when he suddenly turned up in the Pacific Ocean, off the east coast of Japan.

"Here occurred the battle of his life. A coasting craft had been blown off the coast by a heavy gale and was making her way back. It was about an hour after daylight when a big whale was seen to breach about two miles away. It was passed over as a trifling incident, but ten or fifteen minutes later the leviathan was discovered rushing down in the wake of the craft with all the steam he could put on. He was so close aboard, and the sight of him threw the natives into such terror that no effort was made to escape him. He struck the craft on her stern and wrecked her in an instant, and pieces of the wreckage were carried away in his jaws as he swerved to port and swam slowly

away. As the cargo of the coaster was of lumber, the men soon knocked together a raft. The craft did not go down, but sank until her decks were awash, and the men had not yet put off on their raft, when three whaling vessels appeared in sight all at once. These proved to be the Glasgow whaler 'Crieff', the New Bedford whaler 'Yankee', and the English whaler 'Dudley'.

"All had heard of 'Mocha Dick', but all thought him dead. By eight o'clock the three whalers were up and had heard the story, but 'Mocha Dick' had disappeared an hour before. It was agreed to separate and search for him, and that if he were found all three ships should take part in the attack and share in the credit of ridding the deep of such a terror. They did not have to hunt for the fellow, however. While the captains were planning he suddenly showed up about a mile to windward. After his usual fashion he came to the surface under such headway that he seemed to stand upright on the tip of his flukes before he fell over on his side with a crash like the fall of a great building. He wallowed about for a time, and then slued around head to the whalers and remained perfectly quiet. He seemed to be asking what they were going to do about it, and the query was answered by the fall of a boat from each vessel.

"These had only pulled away when three more were lowered to support them. Lots had been cast as to which boat should have the first show, and the honour had fallen to the 'Yankee'. Her boat took a circuit to approach the whale from behind, while the other two lay on their oars to wait. The whale seemed for a time to be asleep, but all of a sudden settled away so quick that every one was dumbfounded. He was about to try his old dodge of coming up under a boat, and each one of them was pulled away from the spot, and a sharp watch kept for signs of his breaching.

"It was twenty minutes before 'Mocha Dick' showed up again. He had hoped to catch a boat, but all were too lively for him, and while he lay wallowing in the seas his fall had created, the mate of the 'Yankee' put a harpoon into him. The old fighter humped up as the iron went in, and for five minutes seemed to have been struck dead. Then he made a rush for the Scotchman's boat, ran right over it, and slued about for the Englishman. It was pulling away from him when he rushed again, caught it with a swing of his long under jaw, and the onlookers beheld a spectacle none of them ever forgot. The whale lifted his great head clear out of water with the boat in his mouth, and at one bite made matchwood of it and pulp of two of the crew who had been unable to tumble out. The crews of the two boats were now floating on the oars, and the whale pivoted and lashed the sea with his flukes to destroy them. In this manner he killed two men, but one of the reserve boats came up in gallant style and rescued the others.

"The 'Yankee's' boat was the only one fast to the whale, and after vainly trying to seize or smash it 'Mocha Dick' suddenly started for the wreck of the coaster, which was floating two miles away. He made a straight course, and the three captains were agreed that his speed, when fairly under way, was not less than thirty miles an hour. As he struck the wreck he bore it down, and it rose behind him bottom side up. To prevent a collision the boat had to cut her line, and the whale soon sounded and was lost to sight. The boat started back, but had not yet reached the ships when the fighting leviathan breached under the bows of the Scotchman and carried away jib-boom and bowsprit with a smash. He had planned to come up under the ship, but had missed it. As he fell upon his side and rolled over on an even keel, so to speak, he made a rush for the 'Yankee's' boat. He was so close on that all

the crew went overboard, and he picked the light craft up and chewed it as a horse does his oats.

"Had it been calm 'Mocha Dick' might have sunk the fleet. Luckily the breeze kept growing stronger, and as soon as the men from the 'Yankee's' boat could be picked up, the three crafts set all sail and beat an inglorious retreat, leaving the whale hunting about for more victims. From first to last 'Mocha Dick' had nineteen harpoons put into him. He stove fourteen boats and caused the death of over thirty men. He stove three whaling vessels so badly that they were nearly lost, and he attacked and sunk a French merchantman and an Australian trader. He was encountered in every ocean and on every known feeding ground. He was killed off the Brazilian banks in August, 1859, by a Swedish whaler, which gathered him in with scarcely any trouble, but it has always been believed that poor old 'Mocha Dick' was dying of old age. He measured 110 feet long; his girth was 57 feet; his jaw was 25 feet 6 inches long. Eight of his teeth were broken off, and all others badly worn down. His big head was a mass of scars, and he had apparently lost the sight of his right eye."

Since the above was in type another account of "Mocha Dick" has been disclosed. It purports to be "A Leaf from a Manuscript Journal, by J. N. Reynolds," and has been brought to light by Mr. R. S. Garnett, to whom I am indebted for a perusal. It confirms the anonymous story of "Mocha Dick's" greatness and ferocity, but asserts that he was vanquished by the first mate of an American whaler. The date of this victory is not told, but it was said by the victor that "Mocha Dick" "measured more than seventy feet from his noddle to the top of his flukes",

and that his white corpse bristled with twenty rusty harpoons, thrust into him in earlier combats. Apparently he was called "Mocha" from an island off the coast of Chili. Mr. Garnett suggests that the author of this Journal (attributed to 1841) is to be identified with the author of certain books on voyages and expeditions, in the name of J. N. Reynolds, New York, 1831 and 1836.

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